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ABSTRACT

This brief is designed to promote collaborative leadership in the work of transforming low performing urban schools into successful schools. The brief is organized into several topics, which include framing the challenge (concentrated disadvantage, concentration effects, and savage inequalities); encouraging educators and partners to promote the collective conviction that low performing schools can be turned around; encouraging educators and partners to gain awareness about and readiness for more comprehensive school improvement initiatives; encouraging educators and partners to become collaborative leaders; highlighting the benefits of such efforts; and promoting new partnerships involving school communities, higher education institutions, state agencies, and charitable foundations. The brief describes problems found in low performing schools (e.g., social promotion, retention, exclusion, deplorable conditions, and staff turnover) and identifies the formula for transforming low performing schools. It classifies and analyzes comprehensive school improvement efforts (e.g., federal and state initiatives and experimental school-community partnerships) and frames action planning for low performing schools. After examining inherited structures, policies, practices, and beliefs, the brief explains how to expand and strengthen comprehensive improvement initiatives and recommends viewing crises as opportunities for strategic investments. (SM)

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Meeting the Needs of Low Performing Urban Schools

*A Policy and Practice Brief**

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Executive Summary

Some urban schools are called *low performing schools* because they do not achieve performance standards. Moreover, clusters of elementary, middle, and secondary schools form low performing feeder patterns. At least half of these clusters' students drop out of school and only a limited number of the ones who complete high school attain passing scores on standardized tests. Many such schools and school clusters operate in urban areas challenged by concentrated disadvantage. These schools' location suggests that some of their performance problems are inseparable from other co-occurring, interlocking needs. In this context, the label "low performing schools" singles out schools, educators, children, and families and assigns them sole responsibility. In fact, this label may promote negative stereotypes about children, youth, families, schools, neighborhood communities, and entire cities.

Fortunately, these low performing schools are becoming important priorities, and the know-how is developing for transforming them into successful schools. For example, the antecedents, causes, and correlates of low performing schools can be identified. Once these relationships are identified, they become the improvement targets. Comprehensive school reforms, also called "whole school approaches," then may focus on these targets.

Although all such comprehensive school initiatives are beneficial, they are insufficiently comprehensive because "comprehensive improvement" entails an exclusive focus on targets inside one school. This walled-in, school planning is very important, but it is not enough. Today's school improvement initiatives need to capitalize on the educational resources offered by families, neighborhood and community leaders, community health and social service agencies, neighborhood organizations, and religious institutions. These initiatives also must address workforce quality problems in schools and in community agencies.

In urban areas challenged by concentrated disadvantage, schools cannot be stand-alone organizations in which educators are asked to do it all, alone. Furthermore, linear, "one step at a time" models for change will not suffice. Comprehensive school-family-community initiatives are needed, and they must not be limited to one school. These initiatives must include planning for entire feeder patterns. Higher education partnerships also are required because they facilitate educational and economic opportunity pathways for children and parents. These partnerships also facilitate the renewal and improvement of professional education programs and research.

When these new specifications are introduced, school community collaboratives are required. Collaboratives facilitate simultaneous, multi-lateral improvement strategies. Working together, diverse people are able to address the needs of low performing schools and the co-occurring needs of families and communities. Everybody benefits.

However, no collaborative is effective unless it enjoys collaborative leadership by educators and their pa ners. The main problem is that many educators and their partners have not been prepared to work in, and with, school-community collaboratives. This brief is structured in response to the needs of educators and their partners. It is designed to promote their collaborative leadership in the crucial work of transforming low performing schools into successful schools, benefiting neighborhood communities and entire cities.

Framing the Challenge

Try to imagine a vibrant city that does not have successful schools. This task is very difficult. Every city's social and economic development, as well as the safety, security, and well being of its residents, depends fundamentally on successful schools.

Now try to imagine the needs and problems a city will confront when two or more of its schools are unsuccessful. This task is easier because it does not require much imagination. It merely requires a reality assessment. For, the fact of the matter is, many cities have low performing, unsuccessful schools. At least half of these schools' students do not complete high school; and even the ones who do may not achieve passing scores on standardized exit tests. A crisis is developing rapidly, and it does not bode well for cities, states, and the nation.

Public concern about these schools is growing in the current policy climate involving state standards, achievement testing, performance-based staff evaluation, results-oriented accountability systems, and workforce development initiatives. Clearly, the needs of these low performing urban schools must be addressed quickly and effectively. These schools must become the top policy and practice priority because they affect the lives and life chances of thousands of children and youth, along with their families and neighborhood communities.

To be successful, these new policies and practices must incorporate new knowledge and understanding about low performing schools, especially their antecedents, causes, correlates, and consequences. In other words, these schools' needs, problems, aspirations, and opportunities must be framed, described, and explained.

At the same time, these schools' family, neighborhood, and community surroundings must be analyzed. When these surroundings are incorporated into the analysis, it becomes apparent that school needs and community needs must be addressed simultaneously and interactively. It also becomes apparent that the label "low performing schools" is a mixed blessing. While this label promotes responsibility and accountability, it also conveys the false impressions that these urban schools can continue to operate as stand-alone organizations; and that educators are solely responsible for these schools' low performance profiles.

Concentrated Disadvantage, Concentration Effects, and Savage Inequalities

Not by coincidence, these schools are associated with special places or localities in each city. Several writers, notably Jonathon Kozol and William Julius Wilson, have popularized the challenges related to these places and their schools.

Kozol, for example, identified the savage inequalities confronting children, families, and educators. He vividly described their social isolation, and he emphasized their needs for assistance, funding resources, and social supports.

Wilson popularized the twin ideas of *concentrated disadvantage* and *concentration effects*. He used these terms to describe and explain how and why once-vibrant neighborhood communities have experienced profound and destructive social transformations. For example, concentrated disadvantage is structured by a terrible and powerful combination of geographic

isolation; social exclusion; economic and social inequality; environmental problems involving pollution, lead and asbestos poisoning, poor air and water quality; and, of course, poverty.

Concentration effects are negative and deviant influences, and they are often defined as social problems. These social problems thrive in locales experiencing concentrated disadvantage, and they reduce individual, family, and community well being. They include crime and delinquency, gangs, violent behavior, substance abuse, unemployment, child abuse and neglect, homelessness and housing insecurities, and family stress. Each social problem (concentration effect) is bad enough. When they are combined, the challenges they pose are even more formidable.

These social problems often co-occur; and even worse, some are interlocking. In other words, these effects are not merely related to each other. When these concentration effects interact, as they usually do in areas confronting concentrated disadvantage, each effect causes the others. For example, substance abuse not only co-occurs with delinquency, but also, each reinforces and often causes the other. All such concentration effects are related to low performing schools.

Low performing schools are another, important concentration effect. These schools co-occur with the other concentration effects, and these schools also are part of interlocking causal chains. For example, effects such as substance abuse, violent behavior, and delinquency are among the causes of low performing schools; and reciprocally, these schools often cause these other concentration effects.

Over time, low performing schools and other, related concentration effects feed on each other. When they do, their relationship intensifies. As they interact, these concentration effects may multiply and spread. When they multiply and spread, they add to the challenges of living in areas surrounded by concentrated disadvantage. These challenges emphasize the importance of life course developmental trajectories for children, youth, and families.

For example, a youth who managed to escape these effects early in her or his life may not be able to do so later. As these concentration effects continue to intensify, multiply, and spread, this once resilient youth may be unable to stave off the challenges. In other words, as these concentration effects cascade, this youth's protective factors, or developmental assets, simply cannot provide adequate safeguards. As this youth falls prey to these concentration effects, and chooses a deviant career with its alternative lifestyle, this person may become "contagious." That is, this youth may recruit others in her or his peer group, and, in turn, these new recruits may recruit still others. Five important implications derive from this chilling scenario involving the intensification, multiplication, and dissemination of negative concentration effects.

Five Important Implications

The first implication concerns people's beliefs, commitments, and convictions.

- **If these concentration effects are not addressed, the vicious cycles they comprise may appear to be intractable, and good people will despair, lose hope, and give up.**

Unfortunately, there is some evidence that this is happening. Two different policies—namely, ones for charter schools and for voucher plans—stem in part from the same two convictions. Advocates for these policies are convinced that low performing schools cannot be turned around. Or, they believe that, even if these schools can be turned around, the process will take too long, and it will not benefit everyone. A growing number of parents committed to their children's education and life prospects are acting on these two related convictions. So are politicians, policy makers, special interest groups, and community activists.

It appears that these concerned individuals and groups fall into two camps. Persons committed to private schools, via vouchers and charters, comprise the first camp. Their approach is to work outside the boundaries of public education. Although this "camp" is not addressed in this policy and practice brief, it merits continuous scrutiny and critique because of the threats and dangers it presents to the core idea of a universal public education and its central role in American democracy.

The second camp is committed to working within the boundaries of universal public schooling. For this second camp, the solution is to expand the range of alternatives. The work of this second camp is relevant both to the needs of low performing urban schools and to this policy and practice brief.

For example, many advocates for charter schools do not believe that they can improve existing schools. Their solution, in essence, is to wipe the slate clean and start a new school. In other people's minds, the other viable policy option is to give individual students a voucher and to encourage them to attend a school somewhere else.

Clearly, both charter schools and voucher plans in this second camp, i.e., ones that continue to promote the core idea of universal public schooling, are beneficial in some respects. It does not make sense to attack them. However, it is important to understand their relationship with low performing schools. Because both charter schools and voucher plans spring from the same pessimistic convictions and conclusions about low performing schools, both may add to the problems and needs of low performing schools.

For instance, school funding, already a problem, becomes more problematic. When charter schools are established, they use district funds. When children and youth take advantage of vouchers and attend school in other district, they take some precious school funding with them.

Moreover, when good students elect a charter school or use a voucher to attend a different school, their departure also makes a huge social and cultural difference. For example, teachers lose students who provide them with the most important reward for their work—namely, the conviction that they can help children learn and succeed in school.

Additionally, when good, or exemplary, students leave a low performing school, an important safeguard or protective factor for other students leaves with them. When vulnerable students are able to associate and bond with these exemplary students, adopting these exemplary students' positive identities, values, aspirations, and lifestyles, this association helps them and

the school. Strong associations and social bonding with exemplary youth may moderate the effects of living in concentration advantage. At the same time, these associations and bonding contribute to learning, academic achievement, and school improvement.

Thus, charter schools and voucher plans may benefit principals, teachers, students, parents, and some community members. However, these alternatives also may contribute to the plight of low performing schools. This reminder lays the foundation for four other implications.

- **Absent more effective policies, practices, and resources, the plight of low performing schools actually may worsen.**

- **As their plight worsens, other related social problems (concentration effects) will intensify, multiply, and spread.**

- **If so, nearby schools located in the same areas, ones that presently perform admirably or adequately, also may be transformed into low performing schools.**

- **If low performing schools are allowed to worsen, and if still other schools are transformed into low performing schools, the social and economic development of entire cities will be imperiled.**

These implications indicate a chain of interacting causes and effects. These causal chains are not simple, linear linkage mechanisms. Rather, these chains involve complex interactions among the several links, including some links that fall outside schools' current jurisdictions.

Clearly, something must be done, and it must be done quickly and effectively. New policies and practices are needed. I have structured this brief in response to these needs, hoping to entice, engage, and empower readers.

The Organization, and Logic of this Brief

I focus on low-performing urban schools and their surrounding communities, calling attention to their plight and needs. I also identify some of their strengths, assets, and aspirations. These communities have immense potential, but too much of it remains untapped. Low performing schools will not be turned around until such time as this potential is developed and fully realized.

Above all, educators and their school and community partners must become convinced that low performing schools can be turned around; and that the residents of these communities do indeed have untapped potential. Without these firm convictions, too many professionals may say "yes," but they will practice "no."

Avoiding Blame and Maltreatment Dynamics

Readers intent on blaming students, educators, parents, other community residents, and social and health service providers will be disappointed with my brief. Similarly, readers

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looking for medical-style diagnoses of individual, school, and community pathologies will not find them in the following pages. The dynamics of finger pointing and blaming are certainly abundant, but they actually contribute to the challenges confronting low performing schools.

For example, in low performing schools and in their surrounding communities, people from all walks of life report that that they feel unappreciated. Many say that they are treated badly and that the quality of their interactions must improve. These reports are indicative of blame and maltreatment cycles. Race matters in these cycles. So does growing ethnic and cultural diversity, which is fueled by immigration and rural-to-urban migration. Where low performing schools are involved, the needs of girls and women also merit special consideration.

America's cities, like others in the world, offer rich educational resources, including racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. This rich diversity has the potential to unite people, and it can serve as an important educational resource. In this perspective, "urban" connotes positive meanings and healthy development. These connotations are accurate because cities, their organizations, and their residents are indeed important educational, economic, social, and cultural assets.

However, these assets depreciate when "urban" is associated with negative connotations. Unfortunately, these negative connotations often prevail, and they include a thinly veiled racism. Here, it is important to emphasize that, when mutual blame and maltreatment are allowed to thrive, and when good people cannot unite and mobilize in pursuit of shared needs and goals, diversity becomes a divisive force. Vicious cycles develop. These cycles perpetuate the problems of low performing schools, and they contribute to the challenges of living in concentrated disadvantage.

A major mental shift is required, one that views diversity as an asset, i.e., as an educational and cultural resource, and not as a deficit or an indicator of pathology. Another implication: Every proposal for meeting the needs of low-performing schools must include firm plans for improving the quality of treatment and interaction and for addressing blame and maltreatment cycles.

Because so many people feel unappreciated and punished, it is time to substitute the carrot for the stick. Policy and practice briefs like this one must be strengths-based, solution-focused, and empowerment-oriented. When they are, these briefs help set the tone for productive, action-oriented dialogue, which facilitates collective action and results in effective and efficient solutions.

My Thesis and Two Primary Audiences

My thesis is that low-performing schools can be turned around. Although there are no quick fixes, the know-how for this work is developing rapidly. Admittedly, some of this know-how is cast in the negative. It indicates what not to do, but it is no less valuable. After all, part of the challenge of defining success and achieving effectiveness is to know what they are not! Even so, the challenge remains of selecting strategies and developing supportive infrastructures that yield the results everyone wants and needs.

The main problem remains: Little or none of this available know-how will get off the shelf if no one is ready and prepared to use and improve it. Mindful of this problem, my brief is designed to facilitate educators' and their school and community partners' access to this fast-growing body of knowledge about how to improve low performing urban schools. Additionally, I encourage education professors and other faculty to incorporate the special needs of low performing urban schools in their professional education programs, to expand their research, and to develop special partnership agendas.

Evidence-based planning and decision-making are essential, and so are evaluation-driven learning and improvement approaches. Mindful of the importance of research, scholarship, and evaluation, I have tried to translate the relevant research and scholarship for a diverse readership. On the other hand, this brief is not peppered with research references, and I do not use sophisticated research language. I have tried to use plain language and to define my terms because I want this brief to be useful, easy to read, and readily understandable. In the same vein, I have opted for a more engaging style of writing instead of a dispassionate, scientific style. My values are evident throughout, as they should be. For, while the research evidence is essential, the work of turning around low performing schools, like the work involved in developing new policies and practices, is value-committed. There can be no pretense that this work can ever be value neutral or value free.

Educators comprise my primary target audience. By educators, I mean teachers, principals, superintendents, state agency leaders, and professors of education. I risk allegations of arrogance when I claim that the majority of them have not received the assistance they need and want as they confront the vexing, complex challenges confronting low performing urban schools challenged by concentrated disadvantage. For example, few education programs in universities prepare principals and teachers to collaborate with community health and social service providers and with families. Furthermore, many educators have not been exposed to the growing number of experimental school and community approaches to comprehensive improvement. These approaches offer several important benefits. Without such exposure, the potential of these new approaches remains untapped.

Educators' enormous potential for collaborative leadership also remains untapped, especially when they are not consulted and engaged in the process. Some educators may perceive these new approaches as the answers to someone else's questions. To the extent that many school reform initiatives are mandated from the top-down, these reforms also may represent the equivalent of answers to important questions educators may not have asked.

In instances like these, educators often are not prepared to assume collaborative leadership for improvement initiatives falling under their own jurisdiction. Like the children and youth they serve, educators should not be criticized and blamed when their preparation programs and prior experiences have not enabled the learning and development required for collaborative leadership in the new school-community initiatives. Like other persons who must be engaged in the work of turning around low performing urban schools, educators can quickly assume such leadership once timely and responsive professional education and continuing professional development programs are provided.

Collaborative leadership implies that educators cannot do this work alone. Once co-occurring and interlocking problems (called concentration effects) are identified, it becomes all the more apparent that educators need good partners. They already have some partners, including student support professionals, social and health service providers, some parents, and policy makers.

Educators will need other partners. For example, many community residents are crucial allies. These residents have expert knowledge about their communities, families, and children, and this expertise must be tapped. Some of these residents once attended these low performing schools, and they remember when these schools performed effectively. These residents share concern about these schools' negative transformations, and they remember fondly "the old neighborhood." These family and community partners are indispensable allies because professionals simply cannot address all of the needs of these schools and their surrounding communities. My brief is designed to promote a common denominator of understanding that includes community residents and other concerned citizens and policy makers. It is designed to facilitate multiple forms of collaboration, which will benefit professional educators, children, and families.

Aims and Goals

I provide for these two audiences an expanded frame of reference for a new and very special kind of school improvement initiative—the kind designed specifically for low performing urban schools. I accept the challenge of trying to persuade educators and their partners of needs for dramatic changes. This challenge requires a new kind of writing, and I may not have the ability to do it. This writing involves some difficult balancing acts. For example, I do not want to absolve educators and their partners of their responsibilities to act quickly and strategically; but neither do I wish to offend them. Above all, I do not want to convince anyone that this work is easy and simple and that there are "magic bullets" for it.

I aim to strike a delicate balance. I attempt to expand educators' awareness and readiness and, at the same time, I try to help other readers appreciate educators' concerns and perceptions. This appreciation serves to temper criticism and enhance empathy. After all teachers, principals, student support professionals, superintendents, and other professionals have learned to look at their schools and their work in specialized ways. One way to enhance awareness and readiness is to emphasize the selectivity, limits, and flaws associated with this pattern of learning, simultaneously suggesting fresh opportunities and new priorities for learning, development, and improvement.

I readily admit my own needs for more awareness and readiness, and, like educators, I do not want to be blamed for omissions and misperceptions caused by the selectivity of my own learning and development. Allow me to be clear on one important issue: No one has all of the right answers for all of needs and problems American cities and some of their schools confront. This basic claim suggests that inquiries like this one should not be limited to a simple inventory of the right answers. Inquiries also must identify the right questions. After all, the available inventory of answers, i.e., the stock of current knowledge and understanding, is always a function of the questions people ask. If people persistently focus on the same questions—at the

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expense of others that are ignored and neglected—they merely reinforce existing knowledge, plans, and strategies. This individual and collective inability to identify and address new questions prevents much-needed innovation, and it limits improvement strategies.

I ask some important questions, and I try to provide a context, which illuminates their importance. I am not the first to ask these questions, and I will not be the last. Parents, professional partners, and policy leaders have helped me understand how important it is to continue asking these questions. Our collective persistence is justifiable if our main assumptions are valid.

I assume that asking the right questions provide the keys to enhancing educators' and their partners' awareness. In turn, their awareness may produce a new state of readiness. By readiness, I mean an active posture indicative of collaborative leadership. For example, as educators' awareness and readiness increase, they will be better prepared to consider, invite, adopt, amend, and invent innovative school improvement policies and practices.

This active role I envision is in stark contrast to the passive roles implied in some school reform plans. In these plans, educators, especially principals and classroom teachers, are expected to obey, comply, and conform in accordance with someone else's good idea. Educators' jobs are simplified in these reform plans; they merely implement others' good ideas.

I view educators' and their partners in a different light. Specifically, I do not view them as implementation puppets. I draw on my experience and my colleagues' when I propose that educators haven not entered their profession with the intent of merely biding their time, in essence going through required motions choreographed by someone else. Every educator I have encountered has wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. Educators have sought a sense of efficacy from their work, a sense that they can and do make a difference. Although their readiness for collaborative leadership may vary initially, once they are provided assistance, supports, and resources, educators and their partners can gain the efficacy they want and need. Then these people become very powerful, resourceful, and skillful change agents.

In short, educators and their partners have immense potential, but much of their potential remains untapped. My policy and practice brief is designed to help tap this potential.

My goals for this brief reflect this design. My five goals are:

1. To encourage educators and their partners to gain and promote the collective conviction that low performing schools can be turned around

2. To enable educators and their partners to gain awareness about, and readiness for, more comprehensive school improvement initiatives

3. To encourage educators and their partners to become collaborative leaders, enabling them to engage actively in improvement planning and to develop innovative policies and practices

4. To highlight the contributions and benefits stemming from this work of turning around low performing schools, emphasizing this work's relevance to other comprehensive school improvement initiatives

5. To promote new partnerships involving school communities, higher education institutions, state agencies, and charitable foundations, partnerships that focus on more effective policies, school practices, professional education, and research, in turn facilitating mutual learning, simultaneous improvements, and continuous renewal.

The Main Argument and the Progression

The know-how for turning around low performing is developing quickly. It can be incorporated in existing improvement plans, and it can be used to develop hybrid plans. All such plans require expansive, integrative thinking. New improvement processes and targets are required. Once these requirements are identified, today's comprehensive school improvement initiatives can be examined anew. For example, these initiatives can be categorized according to their commonalties and differences.

Risking error and the criticism it brings, I suggest that today's initiatives fit one of three categories. When the needs of low performing schools provide the assessment criteria, every one of these initiatives is insufficiently comprehensive. This bold claim is not evidence of arrogance, nor does it signal a lack of appreciation for the hard work and dedication of school reform leaders.

Clearly, these existing improvement initiatives are not wrong, or misguided. All are beneficial in some respects. My point is that they need to be expanded, enriched, and, where appropriate, blended. When they are mixed and integrated, the hybrid approaches that result may be stronger than any one of the contributing plans. For example, they can be tailored to local needs and special conditions, avoiding problems associated with "cookie cutter approaches" and some "replication projects."

Then I address predictable barriers to school improvement. I emphasize the inertia associated with urban schools, and I identify some of the practices and policies that effectively reproduce standardized urban schools. Additionally, I identify strong institutional forces that type cast schools, also serving to standardize and homogenize their structures and operations. This section of my analysis rests on an important assumption. *Unless you understand the factors and forces that serve to type cast, reproduce, and discipline low performing schools, you will not be very successful when you try to change them.* Without this understanding, outsiders looking into schools will not be able to appreciate the orientations and actions of school professionals, especially their inward -looking orientation.

For example, the immense pressure exerted on teachers, principals, and superintendents to improve students' academic achievement (as demonstrated on standardized tests) has reinforced a powerful inward-looking orientation. The national movement in support of teachers' and educators' professionalism also reinforces this inward-looking orientation, and it

may undercut efforts to promote collaboration with community partners, especially parents, community leaders, and social and health service providers.

Additionally, educators are prepared to be inward looking; that is, their orientation is by design. Their preparation often enjoys "sticking power" and "staying power" because it corresponds to their career plans. For example, countless teachers selected their careers because it afforded them the opportunity to work alone, in their own classrooms, with their own children and youth. Predictably, they view the school as a stand-alone organization. In this mode of organization, professional educators work alone, collaborate with each other and seek more decision-making power and professional authority. They are accountable only for students' learning and academic achievement.

In brief, educators' inward-looking orientation is predictable and understandable. Just as the components for producing low performing schools can be assembled in a formula, so too, can one be developed using the contributing components for developing inward looking educators. Once these two formulas are identified, their relationship can be analyzed. It becomes apparent than each reinforces and causes the other. The result is an important paradox.

When educators in low performing schools maintain their narrow focus on the school as a stand-alone organization, they limit their improvement options. When their improvement options are limited, low performing schools do not improve. A clear pattern is evident, and it is self-reinforcing and self-sealing. When patterns like this one are evident, institutional forces are implicated. Educators' orientations and actions stem in part from strong institutional pressures, constraints, and traditions.

It bears repeating that many of the needs and problems educators and their partners confront are new. When so many new needs are evident, knowledge and skill gaps are predictable and understandable. They are no one's fault. Plainly stated, teachers, principals, and superintendents should not be blamed for shortcomings of their professional education programs. Nor is it appropriate to blame their education professors. The multiple needs of low performing school communities are as new to professors and education deans as they are to practicing teachers, principals, and superintendents. Presented with unprecedented complexity and novelty, good people need learning and professional development supports. Educators and their partners need more preparation in support of their readiness to assume collaborative leadership.

These new preparation initiatives also must respond to a related problem I will identify—namely, two workforce quality crises. The first is in education, and the second is in health and human services. Because educators and service providers must work together to transform low performing schools, these two workforce quality crises are related. Each may contribute to the other. Individually and together these workforce quality crises must become key action targets in improvement plans. Successful schools are impossible without good teachers and principals, and effective social and health service agencies are impossible without good service providers. In turn, low performing schools and their partner agencies depend on each other, and so they must develop effective partnerships and collaborative working arrangements.

Toward the end of the brief, I identify three keys that enable educators and their partners to develop more effective and comprehensive school improvement plans. After I provide a context for these keys, I indicate that a key, in my view, is a sensitizing question, not an answer. Because the quality of the answers is also a function of the questions that are asked, I emphasize the generative properties of keys-as-questions. In other words, good questions generate new ideas, language, and discussion. Fresh understanding and knowledge often result, and they enrich improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Next I introduce school-community collaboratives. I suggest that these coalitions are indispensable structures for convening, organizing, and mobilizing diverse school and community stakeholders. I describe briefly the several advantages offered by these collaboratives, especially their capacities to mount multiple changes across several fronts. This capacity for multiple, simultaneous change is exactly what low performing urban schools require. Unfortunately, when educators work alone, remaining inside the schoolhouse walls, they limit their change targets. Most importantly, they are forced to adopt linear, one-at-a-time change models. With collaboratives, educators and their partners can transcend the limitations of linear thinking and change models. Together, they can focus school improvement planning on the school, peer, family, and neighborhood factors that determine children's learning, academic achievement, and success in school.

Then I provide a list of 35 questions. These questions comprise a possible self-assessment inventory, the purpose of which is to increase educators' and their partners' awareness and readiness. These questions also identify key action targets. Because educators and their partners must be convinced that low performing schools can be turned around, these questions invite educators and their partners to examine their beliefs and commitments.

Finally, I suggest that people other than educators and organizations other than schools will benefit as low performing schools are turned around. Specifically, social and health service agencies, families and other community residents, and neighborhood organizations, both secular and religious, will benefit. To reiterate, low performing schools are involved in vicious, self-perpetuating cycles involving other concentration effects. So, as these schools are turned around, and as they are placed on a more positive trajectory, other benefits will accrue. These benefits will spread; and, as they do, virtuous cycles involving positive results will replace vicious ones. Multiple benefits like these are among the dividends accompanying this hard work. These dividends justify strategic investments in low performing urban schools and in their surrounding neighborhood communities.

First things first: Despite local uniqueness, there are important commonalties related to low performing urban schools. Building on the analysis provided in the introduction, I provide next more details about the challenges posed by low performing urban schools.

Describing Low Performing Urban Schools

Low performing schools usually serve large numbers of poor, culturally diverse children and youth whose family systems live in neighborhood communities surrounded by concentrated disadvantage. Many students and their families are highly mobile—that is, they change

residences and, in turn, schools frequently. Student mobility often begins in elementary schools, and it may continue unabated. Some schools have mobility rates of at least 75 percent *each year*. This high mobility rate (transience) signals poverty and its correlates, especially family stress, employment and income needs, and housing insecurities. Low performing schools are home to a significant number of these children and youth.

In brief, low performing schools have high concentrations of vulnerable children and youth. Racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity are commonplace. These children, youth, and families often are challenged by a powerful combination of poverty, social isolation, pervasive inequality, and social exclusion dynamics such as racism, sexism, xenophobia (discrimination against immigrants and people perceived as foreigners), and homophobia (discrimination against gay and lesbian people). This terrible, powerful combination of forces helps explain why many children and families have co-occurring needs.

In turn, these multiple, co-occurring and interlocking needs challenge educators and their partners. The research suggests that any one of these needs is a predictor of school-related challenges and problems. Stated another way, when these children and youth evidence multiple needs, school-related problems are all the more predictable and understandable. No wonder that low performing schools often have high rates of absenteeism, suspensions, and expulsions.

Many vulnerable students are assigned to special education. Although special educators work diligently and often perform valiantly, there are limits to what they can accomplish with some of these children and youth. As every special educator knows, when substantial numbers of children and youth are, in effect, permanently placed in special education; and when a disproportionate number of these students are children of color; this pattern does not bode well for students' academic careers, or for their healthy development. School-family-community relations become strained. For example, allegations of racism increase, creating more problems. All such problems are evident when the analysis shifts from one low performing school to its feeder pattern.

From One School to a Feeder Pattern

The aforementioned interacting and interlocking problems are not limited to isolated schools within a district. In many cities, low performing schools comprise low performing feeder patterns. That is, needs and challenges evident in one school are equally evident in clusters of schools. For example, students may enter an elementary school with needs and problems that challenge the most gifted teachers. These needs and problems are evidence of the importance of prenatal programs, birth to three family support programs, and preschool programs such as Head Start, Even Start, and Early Start. Kindergarten children's needs and problems indicate family and community challenges. Even the best programs for infants, young children, and families cannot address these multiple needs alone.

When these children enter elementary schools with enduring needs, their learning is constrained and limited until such time as their needs are addressed. Said another way, when children's health, mental health, and family needs are not met, school-related problems will result. In this fundamental way, low performing schools are related to low performing social and

health services agencies. In communities challenged by concentrated disadvantage, social and health services may be in short supply, and, like low performing schools, they are plagued by high staff turnover. Staff problems alone help explain why low performing schools often do not enjoy strong working relationships with community service providers.

When young children evidencing multiple needs have difficulty learning and achieving, these learning and achievement difficulties lay the foundation for a predictable, familiar pattern. An entire feeder pattern of low performing schools results. In these feeder patterns, students begin their academic careers in a low-performing elementary school. Then they move to a low-performing middle school. If they complete high school, they will have done so in another low performing school. Even if they complete the requirements for a degree, a considerable number of them may not demonstrate basic competence on standardized achievement tests administered at the end of high school. The implication is, school improvement initiatives must become more comprehensive; they cannot be limited to just one school. Improvement initiatives must include firm, effective connections and articulations with programs for infants, young children, and their families as well as with other schools in the same feeder pattern.

Double Binds: Social Promotion, Retention, and Exclusion Policies

When analysis shifts to entire feeder patterns, and it incorporates programs for infants, young children, and their families, an important dynamic becomes apparent. This dynamic then becomes an important school improvement target. It encourages empathy for educators, especially classroom teachers and principals.

Educators feel trapped in double binds, i.e., they find themselves in what they perceive as "lose-lose" circumstances. This dynamic begins when children do not learn and achieve acceptably; and when teachers lose confidence that they are able to teach these students. When circumstances like these present themselves, educators must make an important decision.

They must decide if they should retain students who do not learn and achieve acceptably. In other words, educators may require a student to repeat a grade, or to remain at a middle school for an additional year. Alternatively, teachers and principals can promote these students, employing so-called social promotion strategies. A third alternative materializes when children and youth act out and present severe behavioral problems. The third alternative is to exclude these students from school. Here, students are suspended temporarily, or expelled permanently. Do not underestimate the consequences of all three decisions. Educators certainly know about these consequences, including the double binds associated with their decisions.

When students are socially promoted, they move to the next grade level without the knowledge and skill they need. In effect, then, when principals and teachers engage in social promotion, they pass along the challenges they did not, or could not, meet. In the process, these educators create teaching-learning challenges and accountability problems for the teachers and principals who follow them.

This next group of teachers must address these students' learning needs and deficiencies before they are able present new content. At the same time, these teachers must present the other

students (ones not socially promoted) with the content specified for their classroom and grade level. Classroom management problems often result. For example, socially promoted students may act out because they are frustrated by their lack of readiness for the new content. So may students who are not challenged, or who do not receive sufficient attention because their teachers are forced to spend so much time and energy with some of the neediest students.

When these circumstances prevail, overall student achievement scores in any given classroom may not improve. Scores might even decline. When more than one classroom is involved, overall school scores may not improve; they may even decline. In short, neither classroom scores nor school scores will compare favorably with state standards. Under these circumstances, educators in one school, perhaps with others in the same feeder pattern, are like victims caught in the social promotion trap.

Unfortunately, retention policies, educators' other alternative, also may place them in a bind. When educators hold back students who do not meet performance standards, and especially when they hold back a significant number of students, they create two problems for themselves and for the students.

The first problem: They create a substantial number of "over-age repeaters." Groups of these students often act out; they present educators and their partners with multiple behavioral and attitudinal challenges. As these children and youth progress through the feeder pattern, they take their behavioral and attitudinal challenges with them.

Even worse, these challenges may intensify, multiply, and spread as these students mature, and as other concentration effects interact with school-related problems. In comparison with elementary school staff, middle school staff face a greater number of problems and needs, and these needs and problems are more intense and difficult. As these students move on, perhaps through social promotion policies, high school educators and their partners encounter the most difficult challenges of all.

Once the second problem related to retention is identified, its relationships with others also materialize. When a student is retained, or held back once, it lowers the probability that this student will graduate from high school. When this student is held back two or more times, graduation possibilities nearly vanish. As with social promotion policies, low performing schools result when many students are held back.

Especially when students are held back more than once, their school related problems track into other concentration effects. A self-reinforcing pattern involving multiple concentration effects develops, and these effects may intensify, multiply, and spread. This same pattern accompanies exclusion from school, whether through suspension or expulsion.

When students are suspended, and when community-based schools and alternative learning settings are not provided, students' time out of school usually means time away from school-related learning. The more a student is suspended, the more the student will fall behind, and the more likely it is that social promotion and retention alternatives will be necessary.

Frequent suspensions often lead to permanent expulsions. When students are expelled, other problems intensify and spread. For example, students who are expelled, like those who are frequently suspended, have a high probability of using drugs and alcohol, engaging in delinquency, behaving violently, and engaging in early sexual activity. Gang membership and involvement may be associated with some such school-related problems. All such activities serve to increase family stress, and they challenge the abilities of the most capable parents. Some of these children and youth may end up in the child welfare system, and others will spend time in detention centers and prisons.

Indeed, as concern over school violence grows, and as zero tolerance policies are implemented, the number of students who are suspended and expelled may increase. Although these students are suspended and expelled, their effects on educators and the school do not vanish. For example, these students often recruit and influence others who remain in the school, encouraging other students to adopt deviant behaviors and lifestyles. Educators' and schools' relationships with parents and community leaders also become strained when suspensions and expulsions occur frequently. When the suspended and expelled students are children of color, allegations of institutional racism run rampant. Here, too, educators and their school partners confront double binds.

Arguably, social promotion, retention, and exclusion practices stem from the same basic need. Educators, their partners, and schools must become more effective with diverse students challenged by poverty, social exclusion dynamics and life in areas surrounded by concentrated disadvantage. These schools need help; they cannot do it all, alone. Although neighborhood needs are important, low performing schools provide a logical and important intervention target. So do students' perceptions, orientations, and needs.

Students' Perceptions, Orientations, and Reactions

Many such schools are over-crowded, and their physical plants are dated. Some school facilities are so bad that they are beyond repair; they need to be replaced. The limitations of these facilities as well as the enormous costs of repairing them become even more apparent once building specifications are introduced for computers and computer technologies.

Where low performing schools are concerned, money, parent involvement, and community supports often are in short supply. Textbooks tend to be out-dated, and there may not be enough of them. The "digital divide" is evident when the stock of computers in low performing schools is compared to the stock in successful schools.

Thanks to the mass media, these deplorable conditions and intolerable resource shortfalls are not secrets. As students mature, they learn quickly that other children and youth enjoy spacious school facilities, modern equipment, and overall, supportive schooling. Little wonder that older students perceive that nobody cares. Their perception signals two other concentration effects; and, both effects are evident in individual schools and in entire feeder patterns.

First, in many students' eyes, schools are not connected to pathways for success, i.e., pathways that lead to higher education and, in turn, to meaningful employment and a better life. This perceived lack of pathways to success is a significant concentration effect.

The second effect requires a brief introduction, one that runs contrary to some popular, but harmful stereotypes. The vast majority of students in low performing schools and in communities confronting concentrated disadvantage are encouraged by their parents to succeed in school and to pursue its pathways for success. Although parents' skills and abilities in support of their aspirations vary, the fact remains many parents are both resourceful and enthusiastic in their advocacy for their children. However, many parents and students do not have access to the assistance, social supports, and resources required to realize their aspirations, and especially to take advantage of educational and economic opportunity pathways when they do exist. This lack of assistance, social supports, and resources related to pathway access and achievement is the second important concentration effect.

In summary, the research documents a clear pattern related to low performing schools and their feeder patterns. Individual students, groups of them, and their parents may have high aspirations, but in the end the barriers they confront are formidable. Educational and economic opportunity pathways may not be established. Even if they are, and students and parents are aware of them, access is limited and blocked because of insufficient assistance, social supports, and resources. In some students' minds "there ain't no makin' it." Little wonder, then, that these students encounter academic difficulty, or that they do not perform acceptably on achievement tests. No wonder so many drop out, develop unhealthy lifestyles, and follow alternative, and sometimes deviant, pathways toward their own versions of successful careers.

Students' perceptions, orientations, and behavior serve to identify several concentration effects, ones that must become school improvement targets. These terrible effects are related to students' perceptions that nobody cares, and they entail working with peers, families, and community leaders. For example, the digital divide must be bridged. Low performing schools must become "high tech," caring school communities with high expectations and standards.

Including Higher Education and Developing Human Capital

Educational and economic opportunity pathways require firm partnerships with community colleges, adult education programs, four-year colleges, and, of course, the universities. In this connection, the problems and needs of low performing schools are inseparable from the priority assigned to workforce development by localities, cities, states, and the federal government.

Clearly, today's low performing schools impede so-called "human capital development" for the new post-industrial, global economy. This economic problem pales in comparison to the social and political problems that accompany it. For example, strong democracy is impossible with strong, successful schools that prepare educated citizens.

Unfortunately, low performing schools are instrumental in producing and reinforcing social and economic inequalities. Allegations of racism and overall social exclusion run

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rampant in low-income communities. Some leaders claim that schools are deliberately under-funded and unsupported; and that the production of a permanent urban "underclass" is part of an explicit design. Although evidence is lacking in support of an explicit design, evidence is plentiful regarding the short and long term effects of ignoring and neglecting the needs of low performing schools and communities challenged by concentrated disadvantage.

The fact is, students in low performing schools are more likely to join the "have nots" than the "haves" of society. Presented with just one option—namely, the opportunity to learn and develop in low performing schools—they will not be prepared for the new requirements for the best jobs and careers in the new economy. They simply will not benefit from new economy's opportunities in the same ways that other students can and will.

As this inequality persists and continues to increase, and as students in low performing schools become aware of it, social problems related to low performing schools will increase. A burgeoning juvenile detention and prison industry, which houses a disproportionate number of poor people of color, should remind everyone that the needs of low performing schools are part of a high stakes game that affects cities, states, and the nation as a whole. A crisis is brewing.

Two Other Workforce Quality Crises

These schools are in crisis for another reason. They may not support the job satisfaction and well being of their professional staff. Staff needs and problems tend to be ignored and neglected because of the priority policy makers and the general public assign to children and youth. In the dominant view, schools are places reserved for children and youth. *To the extent that the needs, aspirations, preparation, supports, working conditions, and well being of the adults working in schools and in surrounding agencies continue to be ignored and neglected, one of the chief causes of low performing schools will not be identified or addressed.*

Here, too, the research documents a clear pattern. Low performing schools are challenged by rapid staff turnover, high absenteeism, and perhaps, growing morale problems. Many of these schools are over-crowded. Over-crowded low performing schools with insufficient resources and located in areas characterized by concentrated disadvantage also evidence a significant staffing problem.

More specifically, low performing urban schools have increasing difficulty in recruiting, supporting, and retaining principals, teachers, counselors, and other staff. This workforce quality problem is a serious crisis in its own right. For example, teacher shortages result in the assignment of less qualified and unqualified teachers to important subjects such as mathematics, science, and reading. A growing number of schools also must employ people who are not certified teachers. Similarly, principals are key instructional leaders. So, when schools start the year without one, or when they change frequently, school effectiveness often declines.

Although this workforce quality problem related to schooling is a universal one in some respects, urban schools evidence it the most. It is a key component in a formula for low performing schools and their feeder patterns. In brief, low performing schools will not be turned around if they do not have enjoy the dedicated services of good teachers, principals, and their educational partners.

Staff turnover alone is a significant problem, and it must become an improvement target. For example, children and youth need a sense of connection to school. They are most likely to develop one when they enjoy a special relationship with a caring adult—typically a teacher. However, when teachers turn over quickly, and when they work in the company of strangers and newcomers, it is less likely that caring, stable relationships will result. Add in student turnover, and the result is predictable. Many of these schools are in constantly in flux, like too many of the families whose children come to these schools. In brief, some of the most basic necessities for effective and successful schooling and for healthy youth development are denied to students, educators, and parents. To the extent that good schools serve to anchor families, limiting their residential mobility, an important family support is lost as schools develop workforce quality and stability problems.

A second workforce quality crisis has developed in communities surrounded by concentrated disadvantage. Staff retention and quality problems also are evident in health and social service agencies, including mental health services, juvenile justice, child protection services, and child welfare services. Like schools, these agencies have difficulty attracting, preparing, supporting, and retaining high quality staff. Just as the quality of teachers and principals co-determines the quality of schools, so does the quality of these agencies' workforce weigh heavily in determining the quality of service design and delivery.

Additionally, when service providers are in short supply, so are essential services for mental health, child protection, and juvenile justice. No wonder that these social and health service systems tend to be called "low performing systems." They mirror some of the same challenges confronting low performing schools because all operate in the same milieu.

Health care systems in these communities pose an even greater problem, one intricately related to the other service systems. Specifically, physicians are in short supply, and this shortage limits health services to needy children and their families. It also requires nurses to assume new responsibilities. When physicians and primary health care centers are in short supply, so are social and health services. For, when physicians leave for other locations, many social and health service providers leave with them. Their collective departure strips low performing schools and their surrounding communities of essential human resources and services. These losses and shortages must be viewed as yet another example of a concentration effect, one that feeds other such effects and contributes to overall concentrated disadvantage.

These two workforce quality crises are related. For example, educators depend on social and health service providers to help children and youth as well as their families. Where low performing schools are concerned, some children and youth will not enter school ready and able to learn if they families and service providers fail to work collaboratively and effectively. In the same vein, juvenile justice specialists and mental health professionals will not be successful and effective with children, youth, and families under their care if schools do not support their efforts. In other words, educators must be prepared to collaborate with providers and families. Education systems (and their professionals) and health and human services systems (with their professionals) thus depend fundamentally on each other. A workforce quality crisis in one reinforces and contributes to a workforce quality problem in the other. So when these two crises are combined, they represent another important concentration effect.

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Identifying the Formula for Low Performing Schools

The idea of deliberately manufacturing low performing schools and feeder patterns is terrible, objectionable, and unthinkable. No one intentionally designed such a manufacturing system. However, the mere presence of a national pattern indicates that something like this is actually happening. The danger looms that policy gaps will be interpreted as malign neglect.

On closer inspection, it is indeed possible to begin the painful work of identifying formulas for low performing schools. The following, rudimentary formula is useful to the extent that it introduces precise, concise formulations of the antecedents, correlates, and causes of low performing schools. This formula also summarizes some of the needs, problems, and issues presented in the previous discussion.

High staff absenteeism and turnover + ineffective training, mentoring, and supports + low funding + high student turnover + over-crowded schools, large classes, and dilapidated physical plants + outdated textbooks + plus insufficient parent involvement and community supports + poverty and its close companions + the lack of clear, effective pathways to higher education and meaningful employment + limited supports and resources in support of upward mobility + limited access to social and health services + service quality issues + living in an isolated area surrounded by concentrated disadvantage + social exclusion dynamics = a low performing school and perhaps a low performing feeder pattern.

This rudimentary formula may be useful because its components are improvement targets. That is, by successfully changing the ingredients in this formula, educators and their partners will be addressing some of the most important antecedents, causes, and correlates of low performing schools. However, a fragmented improvement strategy will not suffice, as the following claim suggests.

Unfortunately, this formula is incomplete; it does not include all of the other concentration effects. For example, this formula does not include high levels of unemployment and under-employment caused by the closing and relocation of factories, businesses, and service industries. It does not include the growing digital divide involving access to computers and computer assisted technologies. It does not include personal-social problems such as substance abuse, crime and delinquency, mental health needs, child abuse and neglect, violent behavior, and chronic health challenges, all of which may co-occur and nest in each other. It fails to incorporate a reduced sense of connection to neighbors, along with the social supports it provides. It does not encompass the psychological sense of hopelessness and despair, along with feeling excluded, isolated, and, in essence, forgotten. It does not take into account professionals' doubts about whether all culturally diverse children and youth are able to learn and succeed in school; and whether teachers and social and health service providers can be effective with them. Nor does it include toxic physical environments. These missing components do not exhaust the list. There are other challenges associated with living in an area confronting the effects of concentrated disadvantage.

When these other components are added, this formula for low performing schools is no longer rudimentary. It is more complete, complex, and powerful. And, unfortunately, it works.

When all, or many, of its components are in evidence, low performing schools and feeder patterns are effectively manufactured.

Once this formula for low performing urban schools is identified, new challenges become apparent. While these challenges should trigger an alarm, they are just cause for despair and retreat. To the contrary, formulas like this one offer to educators and their partners a more complete and comprehensive picture of their improvement targets, thereby paving the way for more comprehensive, effective, and successful school improvement initiatives. In other words, all of these targets must be addressed, and no improvement initiative is sufficiently comprehensive if it does not include them. As each target is addressed effectively, and each success story is documented, these low performing schools will provide important lessons learned for countless others, including ones located in suburban areas and rural communities.

Classifying and Analyzing Comprehensive School Improvement Initiatives

Although many of today's school improvement initiatives are labeled as "comprehensive," they are insufficiently so. Clearly, today's low performing urban schools need more comprehensive improvement strategies and plans, suggesting that educators and their partners must expand their thinking, planning, and action strategies.

An important question remains, however. What kinds of comprehensive school improvement initiatives will turn low performing schools and their feeder patterns into high performing ones? This question compels a search for alternatives. Once the alternatives are identified, the needs of low performing schools can be weighed against their scope and claims.

More specifically, the needs and problems of low performing schools can be weighed against each alternative's aims, missions, improvement and implementation processes, resource and support requirements, and evaluation criteria and methods. These comparative analyses are invaluable because they simplify the search and selection process. They promise to deliver a good fit between schools' needs, problems, and aspirations and these initiatives' abilities to meet them. This process gets easier to the extent that these comprehensive school improvement alternatives can be categorized accurately.

As everyone knows, public schools are becoming more diverse in some cities, even while they remain standardized in some others. As diversity increases, categorizations become more difficult. All such categorizations are selective and limited, and they may even distort aspects of policy and practice. Mindful of these limitations and risks, I identify next three varieties of comprehensive school improvement initiatives.

<u>The First Kind: National School Reform Networks</u>

Several comprehensive reform initiatives focus on low performing schools serving vulnerable children and youth. The most visible examples include Success for All, The School Development Program, The American School Development Corporation, Schools for the 21st Century, Accelerated Schools, the Atlas Program, and the Developmental Studies Program. There are others, including combinations of these plans.

All such initiatives have their own national networks. All offer special training and technical assistance. All have formal plans for implementation, assessment, and evaluation. Alike in these ways, proponents of each tend to emphasize their plan's uniqueness and differences. For example, the Accelerated Schools approach emphasizes empowerment-oriented, accelerated instruction in substitution for remedial, slow-paced drills and skills. It does not emphasize the importance of social and health services. In contrast, the School Development Program includes plans for social and health services and for new parental roles and responsibilities. Its approach to comprehensive school reform differs fundamentally from that of Accelerated Schools.

In short, proponents of each plan force school leaders to make a choice. Schools that choose one initiative cannot adopt and implement the others. These forced choices are justifiable insofar as each initiative operates with different premises regarding best practices, what's wrong that needs fixing, and how best to effect the repairs. At the same time, these "formulas" may be one cause of schools' ineffectiveness because they are insufficiently comprehensive.

Federal and State Initiatives: The Second Kind

Many low performing schools also are Title 1 schools. Title 1 is a special category designated by the U.S. Department of Education. Title 1 schools are home to a significant number of poor children and youth eligible for free and reduced lunches. Schools receiving federal funding must comply with funding requirements, including requirements and options related to school improvement. Parent involvement is an example of a requirement, and reading recovery is an example of an option.

Similarly, special education programs and services are funded and designed to facilitate school improvement and to help students succeed. Today's special education programs emphasize the needs for unification and coherence, along with collaboration among parents, special educators, and other educators. Specifically, they are designed to stop and limit the segregation of special needs students. Grounded in the basic premise that all children and youth are able to learn and succeed in school, special education strategies are designed to address learning and behavioral needs, effectively reducing the classroom "push-outs" and "pull-outs," along with suspensions and expulsions. As schools strive to include special needs students in regular classrooms, special education programs may be viewed as essential components in comprehensive school improvement initiatives.

A related kind of initiative, also funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is called comprehensive school improvement. This program encourages educators to use the entire school as their planning unit, and, for this reason, this program often is called whole school reform. Here, schools are not necessarily required to make a clear choice among alternatives such as Accelerated Schools or Success for All. They are, however, required to conform to reform guidelines and criteria. Above all, they are required to focus on improvement targets, which are derived from the research on effective schools. Schools are required to demonstrate that they plan, assess, evaluate, learn, and improve in relation to these targets. The school also must demonstrate that educators are able to collaborate effectively. Collaboration, in this

framework, tends to be "walled in." That is, collaboration involves educators, pupil support professionals, and members of site-based management teams.

Federal programs in support of special safe and drug free schools also may fall into this category. So may 21st Century Learning Center initiatives (for after school programs) and programs in support of school-linked service integration. These programs are inseparable from comprehensive improvement initiatives when two crucial requirements are met. First: Classroom teachers are involved and engaged in them. Second: Because teachers are engaged, there are firm connections to their work and to improvements in "real school" (i.e., what happens routinely in classrooms).

Unfortunately, these two requirements often are not met. When they are not, many of these federal programs are not integral to school improvement. Rather they are more like special projects designed to improve students' learning readiness. They fit under the educational reform theme of "all children entering school ready and able to learn."

Because these programs are not integral to school improvement, they often take on the status of special projects. These special projects endure only so long as the funding provided by the grants is maintained. Presented with a growing number of special projects, principals and teachers alike often wonder why so many of them must be located and operated at their schools. Despite the important needs they address and the good intentions of their staff, when they are not part of an explicit, coherent design for comprehensive school improvement, special projects may add to the challenges associated with low performing schools and feeder patterns.

State initiatives often mirror federal initiatives. For example, several states offer special funding assistance akin to Title 1. Some states also have their own versions of the federal government's comprehensive school improvement initiatives. Some states specifically target low performing, urban schools. (In fact, some states are involved in "take-overs" of entire city school districts.) For simplicity's sake, these state initiatives are categorized with federal ones.

Experimental School and Community Partnerships

A growing number of urban school districts are experimenting with broader, more comprehensive approaches to school improvement. Although these new approaches have gained a strong foothold in policy and in practice, it nevertheless remains true that districts are continuing to experiment and learn. For this reason, the category descriptor "experimental" is justifiable. Their funding supports provide another reason. Many such experimental approaches continue to be promoted and supported by charitable foundations such as The Kellogg Foundation, The Mott Foundation, The Danforth Foundation, The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and The DeWitt-Wallace Readers' Digest Fund.

These experimental approaches include *community schools*, *full-service schools*, hybrids called *full-service community schools*, and *beacon schools*. Simple definitions provide clarity.

Community schools expand the school day and the school year, emphasizing after school programs, summer programs, and adult-oriented programs. Most such schools have family

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centers or youth centers. Full-service schools invite community health and social services providers into the school, and they require linkages with other providers that are not relocated. Full service community schools do both. They extend the school day and year and they focus on services. Beacon Schools do all of this and more; they operate around the clock and throughout the year. This important diversity notwithstanding, a National Coalition of Community Schools continues to promote a uniform definition of community schools, and it enjoys growing popularity. All of the aforementioned elements are incorporated in this definition of community schools. For example, they house service providers, family resource centers, and adult education programs, and many enjoy the benefit of new school facility designs.

A growing number of low performing urban schools have adopted these experimental approaches. Aware that business as usual today would bring results as usual tomorrow, educators and their partners have adopted these experimental models because they perceived that they had no other choice. They simply could not continue working within the confines of conventional models of schooling and school improvement. Many have imported models developed elsewhere. They describe their work as "replication projects." Welcome in some respects, additional problems also have been created when models have been imported wholesale from other school communities.

These experimental approaches offer important benefits. For example, they are grounded in the idea that schools cannot be effective and successful if they operate in isolation. They emphasize a new planning frame and language. The planning frame changes from the school to the school community, emphasizing relationships with families, community leaders, community health and social service providers, businesses and industry, neighborhood organizations, and religious institutions. Although colleges and universities are included in some of these experimental initiatives—notably the ones sponsored by the DeWitt-Wallace, Danforth, and Kellogg foundations—many focus specifically on one school. When they focus on just one school, and when they omit higher education, these initiatives are limited. Said another way, like the other two kinds of improvement initiatives, they are insufficiently comprehensive.

On the other hand, the label, school and community partnerships, emphasizes one of the chief benefits of this kind of initiative. All such improvement plans are predicated on the following claim: *Walled-in collaboration among educators is necessary and important, but it is not enough.* To be successful, educators must collaborate with parents, community leaders, social and health service providers, and other stakeholders. All such experimental school and community approaches promote and support the basic idea that effective collaboration entails opening the school to diverse stakeholders and permanently allocating spaces and places for them and their work. These approaches expand the school day and the school year, including after school and before school programs as well as summer enrichment programs.

Promising in so many respects, the fact remains that these experimental approaches are exactly that—experimental. Like reform plans such as the School Development Program and Success for All, each of these experimental models has its own logic and success criteria. Like these other plans, national networks are developing in support of their work and development. For example, The National Coalition for Community Schools has developed recently, and it

serves as an organizing center. Similarly, Communities in Schools includes its own national network.

As the label "experimental" suggests, the exact logic and success criteria are continuing to evolve. Arguably, these experimental approaches' most important contribution to date is their insistence that educators and their partners cannot continue to operate narrowly. *Experimental school and community approaches emphasize interdependent relationships among school success and family and community influences, and these approaches also indicate the folly of trying to segregate students' test scores from measures in support of their healthy development.* These important contributions do not reduce the challenges of doing experimental work. In some ways, each approach is like an airplane that educators and their partners are flying at the same time they are designing and building it. When they are asked, some educators admit freely that they are, in essence, "flying by the seat of their pants." They also state that they have no other choice.

Fortunately, knowledge and understanding are growing, and as they increase, a new set of questions about these experimental school and community initiatives is becoming important. Initially, these pioneering leaders faced this question:

- Can we do this new work? For example, are we able to create and operate a full service community school?

Now they confront five other questions. (These questions also pertain to the other two categories of school improvement initiatives.)

- Should a school and its educators do this new work?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of families, community service agencies, neighborhood organizations, the private sector, and religious institutions?
- Can we sustain our innovations in one school?
- Can we scale up to our feeder pattern?

And even if the answer to these three questions is "yes":

- Does "it" enable us to meet state standards as reflected by tests and measures of students' learning and academic achievement?

This last question about student achievement has special relevance for analyses of experimental school and community initiatives. Paradoxically, their major strengths often have been associated with an important limitation. One of their main strengths lies in their mobilization of family and community partnerships, including the development of collaborative working relationships among service providers, community leaders, families, and educators. Another lies in their ability to promote understanding about interdependent relationships among schools, families, neighborhood organizations, and other community agents and agencies.

However, in promoting this outward orientation based on interdependent relationships, these experimental school and community approaches often have not effectively engaged classroom teachers. For example, teachers may continue to work alone, without adequate assistance and supports and continuing to confront double binds. Significant workforce quality issues involving teachers' working conditions, job satisfaction, efficacy, and overall well being are not addressed either. To reiterate, teachers need supports, assistance, and resources. So, when teachers are not leaders in developing firm school-family-community connections, classroom practices and cultures may not change appreciably.

At the same time, many principals and superintendents are being flooded by proposals offered by outsiders. These outsiders claim that school and community partnership initiatives invite their work. These outsiders often have their own agendas. Many offer the prospect of new programs, usually pilot projects funded by new grants. The question is, should principals, teachers, and other staff permit them to operate these programs at the school? Lewis Carroll, the author of Alice in Wonderland, coined a marvelous phrase that describes this problem: "If you don't know where you are headed, then any road will take you there."

Without a coherent plan for making decisions about what and who to include and exclude—especially how each proposal contributes to comprehensive school improvement—low performing schools often end up with a bewildering array of programs, services, and special projects. Unfortunately, experimental school and community partnerships often have not proceeded with such a plan. Desperate to improve student and school outcomes, and operating under the partnership umbrella, educators often have bowed to external pressures. They have permitted many outsiders to bring their programs to the school. These well-intended proposals add to the sense of disarray, and they may compete for space and for resources.

Here, then, is the paradox: *Although significant changes are occurring around the school, everyday life in classrooms and teacher-student interactions, i.e., "real school," may not change appreciably; and furthermore, some so-called partnerships add to the sense of disarray.*

When no or few changes occur in classrooms, the most important determinant of children's academic achievement and success in school is not addressed adequately. Little surprise, then, that academic achievement gains and increases in test scores are at best modest. In other cases, no such gains and increases may be involved. The keys to both outcome measures also are missing in these experimental school and community initiatives.

Assessing the Three Kinds of Improvement Initiatives

My threefold categorization may be faulty. For example, it does not address combinations among two or more kinds of improvement initiatives. Nevertheless, it does serve to illustrate key differences in thought and practice.

And still the question remains. *Will any of these three kinds of school improvement approaches turn low-performing schools into high performing ones?* The answer is paradoxical—it is both yes and no. That is, all three approaches have merit, but all are insufficiently comprehensive. Although they expand thinking and practice about school

improvement, they do not expand them enough. Said in yet another way, these varieties of comprehensive school improvement initiatives are necessary, but, by themselves, they will not be sufficient to turn around low performing schools.

Framing Action Planning for Low Performing Schools

This growing crisis involving low performing schools and feeder patterns is not a declaration of hopelessness and despair. Low performing schools can be turned around; and students and educators alike can be served and supported. As the growing number of comprehensive and experimental approaches school improvement illustrate, comprehensive school improvement initiatives must be expanded and, at the same time, they must become strategically focused.

To reiterate, some urban schools operating in areas challenged by concentrated disadvantage are highly successful, as indicated in their graduation rates and student achievements. Other schools may not have the same overall performance profiles, but they are performing admirably with some of their students and adequately with others.

These two observations are very important. They indicate that vulnerable children and youth are able to learn, pass achievement tests, and succeed in school. They also indicate that educators can teach these children and youth and that schools can provide supportive, caring communities. Additionally, these schools' successes indicate that educators have at their disposal effective and successful practices that low performing schools might adopt, amend, implement, and evaluate. Observations like these also serve as reminders that, while innovative policies and practices are required, educators and their partners do not need to "reinvent the wheel."

A collective "can do attitude" is needed, one that promotes efficacy. Although pervasive needs and problems should not be ignored, a new, positive policy and planning attitude is required. The evidence indicates needs for this strengths-based, solution-focused attitude.

Educators, their partners, and students in these low performing schools often perceive that they are unappreciated, blamed, stereotyped, and victimized. A siege mentality may be evident. In today's climate of state standards and accountability requirements, educators and their partners feel blamed and unappreciated when their students' performances do not meet public expectations and requirements. When this siege mentality is in evidence; when staff morale is low; and when student and staff turn-over are high, deficit-oriented thinking and language will add to the sense of neglect, isolation, hopelessness, helplessness, and indifference. Allegations of racism will continue. Concentration effects will continue to intensify, multiply, and spread.

This new agenda with its positive attitudes is easy to identify and announce. The fact remains, however, that educators, other professionals, policy makers, parents, and other concerned citizens may feel overwhelmed by low performing schools' challenges. Wanting and needing ready-mix solutions, they may be disappointed and discouraged to learn that no such solutions exist. Although the know-how is developing, and progress can be witnessed quickly,

there are no miracle cures when so many complex challenges are present. There also are other challenges, ones that derive from the inertia of low performing schools.

Inherited Structures, Policies, Practices, and Beliefs

Peter Drucker, the acclaimed organizational development guru, often asks managers who need to become leaders the following pivotal question. "If we hadn't inherited our organization and its current ways of doing business, would we continue to do business in this way?" Drucker's question quickly separates *managers*—who are preoccupied with doing things right—from *leaders* who know the importance of ensuring that the right things are done. While managers insist that people work harder, leaders also encourage them to work smarter by reconfiguring their organizations and, perhaps, their inter-organizational relationships.

These leaders understand readily the problems stemming from inward looking management, along with control for the sake of control. Leaders understand how dangerous it is to place an organization and its related systems on automatic pilot; and of failing to take into account changing circumstances, new needs and problems, and fresh opportunities to enhance resources and improve effectiveness. Leaders also are prepared to shift their priorities as their understanding changes of needs, problems, and opportunities. Leaders are ready to stop doing some things; to strengthen today's most important initiatives; and to innovate strategically.

Obviously Drucker's question has import for the challenges of low performing schools. However, his question must adapted to fit the needs of low performing schools and their surrounding communities. Here, then, Drucker's adapted question.

If we hadn't inherited these low performing schools—along with their organizational shells, limited staffing, traditional roles and responsibilities, conventional policies, and enduring practices—would we organize and conduct these schools in the same way? For some readers, this is a rhetorical question with an obvious answer. Nevertheless, this rhetorical question must be asked. It invites important planning dialogue, which may help persuade others.

Drucker's adapted question leads to a second one; and, it involves strategies and tactics. What mechanisms may constrain and prevent effective leadership and improvement strategies? This second question provides an important reminder for educational leaders and their partners. *In order to change inherited organizations, policies, and practices, you must understand the mechanisms that reproduce and maintain them. Only then will you know when, where, how, and why to intervene.* Once you have this understanding, you can work more efficiently and effectively. For example, you will understand which kinds of incentives and rewards are needed. You will be able to identify the persons who have a stake in the action (stakeholders). You will know which stakeholders need to be engaged in the process of developing solutions. You will be able to identify policy needs, resource requirements, and technical assistance strategies.

The above claims beg for clarification. Concrete examples are needed of the forces and factors that are associated with schools' inertia, including how educators and their partners actively reproduce their policies, practices, and relationships. Four such examples follow.

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Each example identifies forces and factors, which maintain and reproduce schools as they are. These four examples are intricately related, and they do not exhaust the list of possibilities.

1. Reforming Again: Indifference, Fatigue, and Resistance

Classroom teachers and principals actively may actively reinforce the status quo, and, if they do, they are responsible for some of their schools' inertia. This observation is not a blanket indictment. Actually, it includes an expression of empathy.

Educators may be especially wary of yet another set of reform promises and so many new strategies. As Harvard University's Richard Elmore states, schools reform over and over again, but only a few offer demonstrable improvements to show for their efforts. If Elmore is correct, then it is not the least bit surprising that teachers and principals may entertain doubts about whether they can and will make a difference, or whether "this year's new thing" will last. School managers face this problem no less than school leaders.

Such informed skepticism and even resistance are predicable when the third kind of comprehensive improvement model is involved—i.e., the experimental school and community approaches. Especially when these approaches are imported wholesale, and when teachers are not involved in the decision to adopt them, their indifference, skepticism, and resistance are understandable and predictable. For example, these experimental models require collaboration with parents and community leaders, necessitating power- and resource sharing. These models thus clash with teachers and principals' political agendas for educators to be treated and supported as true professionals. Many want more power and authority over school and classroom decisions.

At the same time, parents, community leaders, and some community professionals are seeking equal power and authority over many of the same decisions. Outsiders also seek more influence and control over educators and schools. In brief, competing agendas are commonplace, and they involve contests about educators' jurisdictions, power, and authority. Competing agendas are not formulas for success. Success formulas require shared understanding and basic agreements.

Unfortunately, this crucial work of developing shared understanding and reaching basic agreements has been neglected in some schools, and it has been ignored in others. Although this problem is especially likely to occur with the first two categories of school improvement, it also may occur with experimental school and community models. For example, these experimental models are, for many educators, like answers to questions they either have not asked or deemed important.

Quite understandably, many educators are simply tired, and others say that they are "burned out." Some will remain indifferent, while others are suspicious, and still others may offer resistance. Every reform and improvement plan may be greeted with these same reactions. These reactions and the orientations underlying them are signs of inertia.

2. External Pressures on Educators, Students, and Schools

Every improvement proposal must take into account the extreme political pressure being exerted on schools as well as the stress it places on educators and their partners. State standards, results-based accountability systems, performance evaluation schemes involving merit pay and new career ladders for teachers, and standardized achievement testing all weigh into this rapidly-changing, pressure-packed, and stress-inducing situation. These external pressures compel educators to narrow their thinking about their practices and to develop an inward-looking orientation. Narrower thinking and inward-looking orientations reinforce schools' inertia.

Understandably, many teachers are bowing to the pressure. They are narrowing their thinking about their jobs and their curriculum; and they are gearing their instruction to the required standardized tests. No wonder educators' priorities for school improvement are inward-oriented.

Predictably, teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards, and politicians are focusing their efforts on reducing class sizes and creating smaller schools. These inward-looking proposals, like others not mentioned here, are beneficial in many respects. Who would argue against the desirability of smaller classes? Who would protest against the establishment of smaller schools in which students feel cared for and in which teachers feel supported? Who would suggest that teachers should not focus on students' outcomes? The problem is not with these new priorities. The problem is with the priorities that are left out.

Unfortunately, the pressures exerted on educators and schools act as constraints and barriers related to the priorities that are left out. These pressures keep educators focused inward, reinforcing the idea that they should work within the confines of their respective schools. When educators feel blamed and unappreciated for what they perceive as thankless work, a siege mentality prevails. This siege mentality reinforces this inward orientation. This inward orientation forecloses opportunities for educators to develop community collaboration networks, and it limits educators' receptivity to the experimental school and community initiatives. A school's inertia increases, and so may the inertia of feeder patterns and entire districts.

3. Learning and Preparation Challenges

Few reasonable people are willing to blame children and youth when they evidence needs for learning and social supports. When children's learning needs are apparent, they need empathy and encouragement, and they also need rapid response learning and improvement systems. When educators, service providers, and other partners evidence the same kinds of needs for learning and preparation, they deserve the same empathy and encouragement. Educators also need the same rapid response learning and improvement systems.

These new learning and improvement systems must address some of the inertia in today's professional education programs. These preparation programs, in turn, are responsible for some of the inertia in today's school organization and practices.

Arguably, most preparation programs are designed in relation to a one-dimensional model of conventional schooling. Although all programs disseminate alternative roles and responsibilities, along with policy and practice alternatives, they also are standardized to some extent. In other words, many such preparation programs resemble "cookie cutter approaches." These uniform approaches are predicated on universal roles, responsibilities, and knowledge requirements for teachers, principals, superintendents, and other education professionals.

A number of factors contribute to program uniformity. These factors include program accreditation and state licensing and certification requirements. Additionally, higher education institutions imitate and follow each other. The career orientations and patterns of education faculty also are instrumental in promoting uniformity. Professors' incentives, rewards and doctoral preparation programs weigh heavily in the production of basic uniformity.

Mirroring this uniformity, the education research community often announces its work in support of *a* knowledge base for teaching; or *a* knowledge base for school management and leadership. This idea of a single knowledge base–as contrasted with two or more knowledge bases that respond to the growing diversity of schools and the attendant pluralism in actual practice–are indicators of selectivity, silence, and need in the education professions.

Reflect again on Drucker's adapted question. Think anew about the new requirements and scope of experimental school and community improvement initiatives. Return to the workforce quality crises in schools and in social and health service agencies. Now ask yourself the following five questions.

- How many teacher education programs are designed to prepare teachers for the new challenges related to low performing schools and concentrated disadvantage?

- How many educational leadership programs are designed to prepare new principals and superintendents for these new challenges?

- How many programs prepare student services professionals (e.g., school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers) and community health and social service providers for these new challenges?

- How many programs prepare teachers, principals, student services professionals, and community health and social service providers to collaborate effectively with each other; and to collaborate with children, parents, families, and community leaders?

- How many college and university faculty have been prepared to address these new challenges in their teaching and research?

Each of these questions, while important in its own right, is inseparable from the others. When these questions are combined, five implications can be derived.

To reiterate, they indicate learning, development, and leadership needs. Second, they identify higher education improvement targets for low performing schools and their partners.

Third, these questions identify resource priorities, new policy agendas, and innovative practices related to preservice professional education programs and professional development programs. Fourth, these questions serve as reminders that educators are not alone in manifesting learning and preparation needs; service providers also have needs.

Fifth, these constraints and barriers related to preparation programs highlight the importance of higher education institutions in relation to low performing urban schools. *Higher education institutions and low performing schools fundamentally depend on each other.* Higher education is essential to the work of turning around low performing schools; and reciprocally, these schools help higher education institutions respond and innovate. This dual work must be harmonized and synchronized. It necessitates firm partnerships between higher education institutions and low performing feeder patterns of schools, partnerships that enable simultaneous learning, improvement, and renewal. When these partnerships are conspicuously absent, inertia in both higher education and in schools is reinforced.

4. Institutional Pressures to Comply, Conform, and Standardize

Drucker's adapted question invites rational action. Unfortunately schools, like other systems, do not always behave rationally. Rational, collaborative leadership and improvement strategies, which promise to change existing operations and improve results, may never get off the drawing board. Given a choice, educators, their partners, and their powerful external constituencies may opt for irrational, maintenance strategies and control-oriented management. Both the signs and causes of inertia are evident in instances like these. This inertia is especially prevalent in large urban school systems. These systems are especially likely to exhibit high levels of standardization and control-oriented management technologies.

To put it another way, even if there is a better way to organize schools and conduct their operations, and this better way promises to improve results and yield multiple benefits, educators, their partners, and powerful constituencies may choose not to change. This fundamentally irrational response is understandable and predictable. It indicates inertia.

Furthermore, even if schools change for awhile, these changes may not have any sticking power or staying power. The research in this area is as clear as it is discouraging. Lasting, deep changes, which penetrate to the organizational hearts and souls of schools, are immensely difficult to mount, implement, and sustain. Seymour Sarason offered this rule about school-related inertia: "The more things change, the more they remain the same."

If Sarason is correct, schools resemble each other more than they differ. This observation also pertains to charter schools and to magnet schools. This same observation applies to many experimental improvement initiatives. Strip away their external family and community partnerships, and it becomes apparent that, in many of these experimental initiatives, the basic structure of schooling often has not changed appreciably. One way of thinking about and practicing schooling at the classroom level continues to be the way. This kind of inertia is very potent, and efforts to address it depend on knowledge and understanding about it.

A growing body of research identifies how and why schools and other organizations do not change. For example, schools' external regulatory standards encourage shared organizational structures and cultures. Schools also imitate each other, and, in many cases, imitation limits and prevents change.

When schools gain this special permanence, conventional policies and traditional practices associated with them do not require much debate and justification. Their value is self-evident. Here, schooling, together with its policies and practices, is part of the stock of everyday knowledge called common sense. When such a dominant view reigns, and when educators, their partners, and external constituencies support, promote, and police it, dramatic change is immensely difficult to mount, implement, and sustain.

One or more low performing schools attempting to respond to Drucker's question and trying to innovate can expect extreme pressures to, in essence, "come back to the organizational herd of schools." Leaving this herd brings threats of sanctions, resource losses, and strong challenges from external constituencies. More positively, new incentives and rewards may be extended in exchange for returning to the organizational herd. Institutional forces are at work in circumstances like these, and they have disciplining power. These forces are responsible for standardizing and homogenizing schooling, spanning yesterday, today, and tomorrow. These forces are important production mechanisms for organizational inertia.

As with all institutional matters, this dominant view of schooling turns out to be a mixed blessing. This dominant view enables some benefits, and at the same time, it precludes others. Low performing urban schools can ill afford the loss of these benefits. These significant losses become apparent when the dominant institutional view of schooling is analyzed critically.

Three main assumptions drive this dominant institutional view. First, educators can only control experiences inside the schoolhouse walls. Second, educators are only responsible for their schools and accountable only for student learning and academic achievement. Third, educators need to be monitored, evaluated, and kept in check by powerful external constituencies. These constituencies often want schools to remain standardized and homogenized, and they express concern about radical innovations. These three assumptions provide certainty and stability. Assumptions like these make schools and school districts easier to manage, control, and discipline. These main assumptions underlie the common sense understanding of what a school is and does.

In this dominant, institutional view, the American public school is a stand-alone organization. It is designed for children and youth. Teachers work alone in classrooms. Principals provide instructional supervision for teachers and manage the school's operations.

The school's mission is to enable students' learning and academic achievement. Educators assume responsibility for students' learning and academic achievement, and they are held accountable for them. In this institutional view, educators and their colleagues located at the school not responsible or accountable for any needs other than those that fall into this special category.

This limited range of responsibility and accountability are justifiable because it is assumed that responsibility and accountability for learning and academic achievement can be separated from accountability and responsibility for children's healthy development. The well being of families and the vitality of neighborhood communities also are separate. These other areas are someone else's responsibility. Specifically, social and health service providers, in the school and in the community, are accountable for these other areas.

This kind of categorical thinking and practice, with its underlying assumptions about specialization of function, responsibility, and accountability, originates with industrial age thinking about machines, assembly lines, and factories. Categorical thinking, policies, and practices for industrial age schools and school systems also contribute to their inertia. Parents' roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities follow suit.

Parents are involved at the invitation of educators, and educators determine parents' accountabilities, responsibilities and roles. Specifically, parents are responsible for their children's attendance, healthy development, and completion of homework. Parent-school relationships often are structured in relation to parents' effectiveness, as judged by educators.

"Good parents" honor their responsibilities, and they also participate in parent teacher organizations and attend teacher-initiated conferences regarding their children's progress. "Bad parents" do not; and therefore, they present a problem. Until this parent problem is fixed, students may not succeed in school, and educators cannot achieve the standards set for them. Educators typically assign this parent problem to a school social worker or to community-based service provider. Reflecting the school's accountabilities and control mechanisms, educators call these services "student services" and "children's (youth) services." As Meredith Honig, Joseph Kahne, and Milbrey McLaughlin suggest, principals and teachers rely on "fix, then teach" strategies.

Reinsert educators' preparation programs into this familiar institutional pattern, and it is nearly complete. To reiterate, preparation programs, along with their requirements for accreditation and certification, usually reflect and reinforce this dominant view. Powerful external constituencies such as school boards, state education agencies, and group of politicians also shape this dominant institutional view. Each component in this institutional pattern reinforces the others. In combination, they keep individuals, schools, and school districts in line with the herd.

Obviously, low performing urban schools can ill afford to tag along with the dominant herd and its fields of action. Low performing urban schools have unique fields of action because they are located in distinctive places. Low performing schools must confront concentration effects and co-occurring, interlocking needs. If it can be safely assumed that these schools simply must change quickly, effectively, and dramatically, then these low performing schools must be able, and permitted, to leave the dominant herd. Metaphorically, these schools comprise a need breed requiring their own herd.

Above all, they need a new generation of collaborative educational leaders. These leaders must possess knowledge and understanding about institutional forces and herding

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processes. They must be able to address institutional inertia. These leaders can employ their knowledge and understanding to encourage and support lasting, penetrating change.

Experimental school and community partnership initiatives have paved the way for this new knowledge and understanding. For example, these partnership initiatives have developed national networks and coalitions. These coalitions add legitimacy to community schools, announcing that they are permanent institutional fixtures, not experimental initiatives. In other words, these school and community partnership initiatives are gaining acceptance as a new breed of schools and a new organizational herd. Similarly, new policies emanating from school boards, district offices, state agencies, and federal agencies in support integrated school and community services also may facilitate lasting change

Furthermore, entire feeder patterns of schools have formed organizational coalitions. Announcing themselves as "families of schools," they have jointly planned and implemented their innovations. Their innovations are supported because no one school stands out from the family (or "herd") and because they have developed broad-based education and constituency-building efforts aimed at families, community leaders, and school board members. Mindful that these external constituencies have the power and authority to discipline innovating schools, bringing them back to the herd, leaders in these schools have made families, community leaders, school board members, and other key stakeholders their educational partners. These partners are at the school-community improvement table with a stake in the action and in the outcomes. When these partner-stakeholders are at the table, they help address the inertia. These stakeholders also help generate supports and resources.

Thus, collaborative leaders intent on transforming low performing schools may be advised to ask the following question early in their work. *Which people and regulatory agencies will attempt to keep us in line with the rest of the herd, and what social action strategies can we employ to insure that we are able to counter their efforts, while enhancing our ability to innovate and improve?* Leaders who ignore this question and neglect the new social action strategies for addressing it will do so at their own peril. Any short-term gains these leaders witness are not likely to translate into permanent, penetrating improvements. Over time, these schools will, in essence, regress.

In short, Sarason's rule will trump Drucker's question. The more these low performing schools change, the more they will remain more or less the same. In turn, business as usual today will bring results as usual tomorrow. With this latter observation, the discussion has come full circle. Results as usual are unacceptable and intolerable. They contribute to looming crises.

Expanding and Strengthening Comprehensive Improvement Initiatives

The preceding analysis might easily result in strategic paralysis. If educators and their partners become, in essence, paralyzed, and if they postpone strategic action, the problems they confront are likely to intensify, multiply, and spread. Aiming to prevent paralysis through analysis, this brief now turns to strategic action strategies and targets.

An action-oriented stock of knowledge and understanding is available. It provides guidelines concerning what to do, when, where, how, and why. This stock of knowledge also includes some negative lessons learned. These negative lessons indicate what not to do or try. Clearly, these negative lessons are as important as the positive ones. Negative lessons help focus attention, improve efficiency and effectiveness, and conserve people's energy, commitments, and time. Together these positive and negative lessons may save children's lives.

Two Important Reminders

The mere fact that this stock of knowledge and understanding is incomplete prompts two related reminders.

- **Strategic, justifiable risk-taking is essential in this work.**

Michael Fullan, the school change expert, offers this guideline—"Ready, fire, aim."

An incomplete stock of knowledge and understanding is not an excuse for failing to act quickly, prudently, efficiently, and strategically. While more research is desperately needed, there are limits to an approach that separates research from practice, with attendant claims that research in pursuit of knowledge comes first and practice comes later.

To the contrary, where new, complex, interacting problems are concerned, research, evaluation, and innovative practice must be integrated. Research is not always prior to action. In many cases, research is in the action, and the "knowing is in the doing." My second reminder follows suit.

- **Every proposal for addressing the needs of low performing urban schools must include firm provisions for evaluation in service of learning, improvement, and knowledge generation.**

In brief, evaluation is itself a school improvement target and action strategy. As David Fetterman and Henry Levin suggest, educators and their partners must "take stock" of their strategies and progress indicators in relation to their improvement targets and the results they want and need. Evaluation presents a safeguard against accepting at face value each and every change initiative and pursuing it for its own sake. No program or strategy is likely to be self-validating. It is possible to doubt whether any program or strategy will work as planned in every situation. Thus, data based and evidenced-based planning and decision-making, which are facilitated by strategic evaluation and research designs, are critical to every initiative's success and effectiveness.

Developmental and empowerment-oriented evaluation methods are simply indispensable in the work of turning around low performing schools. These methods prioritize the practical uses of the knowledge they yield. These methods also include measures to enhance individual, group, and organizational capacities to use data in their decisions and to embed evaluation in the everyday life and routines of the school community. In other words, the best evaluations are not

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done to educators and their partners; the best evaluations are done with and by them. When evaluation is conceived and performing in this way, it sets the stage for three keys for success.

Introducing Keys for Success

Countless educational entrepreneurs regularly visit superintendents, principals, and other school personnel with the expressed intent of selling them a solution to one problem or another. Mindful of this everyday reality, the idea of keys for success can be introduced by means of a realistic, but cynical frame of reference.

"A sucker is born everyday." This infamous line belongs to P.T. Barnum, the circus magnate, and he used it to describe his success and opportunities at the beginning of the 20th Century. Barnum's claim encourages a cynical reading of the history of school improvement.

To the extent that schools and school districts have reformed over and over again without improving significantly, educators may have been sold approaches that have not lived up to their advanced billing. To the extent that some approaches had little hope of ever providing all of the benefits their advocates proclaimed, educators and their partners may have been more or less "suckered" into buying bogus plans. When the prior history of school improvement is interpreted in this cynical fashion, yesterday's reform failures influence today's possibilities.

As the 21st Century begins, educators and their partners have indeed grown wary of persons promoting the equivalent of "the keys to the kingdom." Where low performing urban schools are concerned, this wariness and skepticism are wholly understandable. Arguably no one has all of the answers, and therefore no one has all of the keys to success.

Indeed, the traditional idea of a key to success must be criticized. In the history of school reform and improvement, a key is usually someone else's good idea. In fact, a key is someone's answer. Oftentimes, this school improvement key is like an answer to an important question that educators and their partners have not asked, or deemed important. Their job is to accept at face value the claims accompanying this key. They are expected to buy into it and implement it. When uncritical acceptance is the norm, the ghost of P.T. Barnum lurks in the background.

In order for the basic idea of a key to be welcomed, it must have a different meaning. This new meaning, or definition, must provide safeguards that prevent false advertising. This new idea for a key also must respond to ethical imperatives concerning how colleagues and friends living in a democracy should interact with each other. Colleagues and friends interact and plan best when their playing field is level; when information is plentiful, accurate, and shared; when dictators are absent; and when responsibilities for decision-making are shared.

My three keys belong in this context. They are questions, not answers. These keys-as-questions have an important property or potential. They may generate new knowledge and understanding because they stimulate reflective thinking and action-oriented dialogue. As they generate new understanding, they encourage the development of innovations. In turn, these innovations pave the way for more comprehensive and successful improvement plans and strategies. In short, generative keys promote multiple benefits, and these benefits may spread.

The First Key

Sometimes the most important needs are the most obvious ones. These most important needs often produce the best questions, the new century keys for success. The first key is obvious, but it is no less important because it is.

1. Do you believe that culturally diverse children and youth challenged by poverty, social exclusion, social isolation, and inequality can learn, succeed, and excel in school; and do you believe that you have the ability to help them do so?

Even the most elegant and comprehensive school improvement plan will fail if educators and their partners are not convinced that the children and youth can learn and succeed, indeed that some can excel; and that they can help them do so. Without these fundamental beliefs and the commitments they inspire, low performing schools will not be transformed into successful ones.

Deficit-oriented thinking regarding children, families, and communities often prevails in low performing schools. To be sure, children and youth do manifest needs for improved services, supports, and resources, and many need responsive services. However, when professionals view these youngsters narrowly as "walking clusters of needs and problems," professionals miss important opportunities to identify children's aspirations, strengths, and assets. Once these opportunities present themselves, build-from-strength strategies can substitute for remedial instructional and service strategies. In all such cases, positive beliefs, assumptions, and convictions are the bedrock for professional orientations and actions.

Silence and selectivity in local, state, and national educational policy documents are part of this problem of developing appropriate belief systems. Some such documents are simply too narrow, and they inadvertently contribute to the dominance of deficit-oriented thinking. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's Goals 2000 document exerted powerful influences, and most of them were important and appropriate. Recall that this document emphasized the following familiar goal. *By the year 2000, all children will come to school ready and able to learn.* This goal is commendable and important. It signals important family and community priorities. Once these priorities are identified, policies and practices for addressing them may follow.

On the other hand, documents like this one also create problems when companion goals are missing. Here, for example, is one such missing goal: *By the year 2000, all schools will be ready to improve the learning, healthy development, and well being of every child.* When goals like this one are missing, the "problem" is always with the community and its people, and schools may be absolved of responsibilities for their own needs and problems. Little wonder, then, that a classroom teacher may not believe that she can teach many of her children; or, even if she can, she believes that her effectiveness is limited because these children are not coming to school ready and able to learn. No wonder "fix, then teach" strategies and thinking prevail. Educators' and their partners' beliefs often drive their orientations and behavior. Low performing urban schools provide important cases in point.

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One other important dimension of professionals' belief systems must be emphasized. When the professional workforce is predominantly white (Caucasian), and when most of the children, youth, and families are not, educators' and their partners' beliefs and convictions are all the more important. Here, race, ethnicity, and gender matter, and so do their interactions. These diversity matters must be addressed explicitly and continuously. High performing schools use this diversity as an educational resource, and they announce their beliefs and commitments through their formal missions and value commitments. These schools are able to use racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity as a source of identify and pride. Here, diversity is a force that unites people, and it drives their teaching, learning, development, and convictions. A collective "can do" attitude prevails, one indicative of individual and collective efficacy and empowerment.

The Second Key

Routine conversations in teachers' lounges and in school meetings provide golden opportunities to identify some obvious, important needs. Before too long, a teacher or a principal will say something like this: "If I had some control over this child's life outside my classroom and this school, I could be much more effective." The need is obvious, and it is not merely important. It is crucial.

Educators know that they have, at best, limited access to some 9-12 percent of a student's time. When after-school programs are added, this percentage may increase somewhat. Even so, less than half of a student's time in school may be so called "time on task," i.e., time devoted to learning and academic achievement. Educators know this, and they also know how important it is to maximize the time they have with children in school.

Furthermore, educators know how the terms and conditions surrounding their work limit their effectiveness. They know that they could perform better under more favorable circumstances. Given a choice, they would like to have more influence and control over students' time and activities. Specifically, educators want children and youth to spend their non-school time in activities and in places conducive to beneficial learning and healthy development.

However, as long as the restricted school day and the schoolhouse walls define and limit educators' efforts, and as long as they continue to work alone and engaged in limited, walled-in collaboration, their effectiveness and success will be constrained, even prevented. Even worse, educators may be blamed for low test scores and other measures of student learning and performance. When educators are blamed and feel unappreciated, some may give up. Results do not improve, and the workforce quality crisis intensifies.

In this context, it is timely to reintroduce Drucker's adapted question because it introduces the second key. To reiterate: *If we hadn't inherited low performing schools—along with their organizational shells, limited staffing, traditional roles and responsibilities, conventional policies, and enduring practices—would we organize and conduct these schools in the same way?* Assume, if only for the time being, that the answer to this question is "no."

That is, assume that educators and their partners would operate differently if they could wipe the slate clean and begin anew. Assume that they are able to work smarter, not just harder.

Assume that they would create more favorable working conditions and better learning environments for children and youth. Also assume that results will improve as educators and their partners do this good work. Last, but not least, assume that the most important factors related to learning, academic achievement, and success in school are well known, thanks to a growing body of research. These related assumptions illuminate the second key.

2. Are you willing to focus improvement planning on the most important peer, family, and community factors that determine children's learning, academic achievement, and success in school; and to address these factors via more effective working relationships with families, service providers, community leaders, and other educational partners?

Surprisingly enough, most improvement plans do not start with the evidence regarding all of the factors that influence and determine student learning, academic achievement, and success in school. Or, if they do, many such factors are viewed as inadmissible because they fall outside of the school's immediate jurisdiction and control.

Therefore, most improvement plans start with schools as they were and are—as stand alone institutions, concerned exclusively with children's learning and academic achievement, and in which educators and their current partners do it all, alone. Although some research is consulted and employed, it is typically inward-oriented, walled-in research. That is, this research takes the conventional school boundaries, roles, and responsibilities as its frame of reference. The determinants of school effectiveness, the incentives for teachers' collaboration, the success formulas for site based management teams, the strategies for involving parents, and other important topics often are framed by the dominant, institutional view of schooling. Clearly, this research is imperative; the point is not to criticize it. The point is that a related body of research is omitted in school improvement planning, and opportunities to learn and improve are foreclosed in the process.

To reiterate, some of the most important questions and improvement priorities often stem from the most obvious needs and everyday realities, and so it is with this second key. Doesn't it make sense to expand the boundaries of school improvement to gain influence and joint control over the factors that prevent you from achieving the results you want and need? If you could do this; and if, as expected, your results improved, wouldn't it provide you with "a lift." If others had the same experience, wouldn't it do the same for them, and, in turn, for your entire school? Is there any reason why other schools in your feeder pattern could not follow suit? Can you begin to imagine the benefits for children and their families?

Clearly, it is timely to change strategically and selectively the circumstances under which educators work, the practices they use, the way low performing schools operate, and the policies surrounding them. It is time to use the evidence derived from successful schools to decide what to stop doing, keep doing, and start doing. It is a time for collaborative leadership.

The Third Key

While the second key is outward-oriented because it asks educators and their partners to look for effectiveness and success outside the familiar confines of the schoolhouse walls, the

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third is inward looking. While the second implicates outsiders, the third implicates insiders, notably teachers, principals, and superintendents. This third key is more delicate to approach and more difficult to address. Even when this key is framed as a question, it implies criticism and a lack of appreciation. View it is a generative question, not a blanket indictment.

Recall that some schools located in communities challenged by concentrated disadvantage are not classified as low performing schools. Apparently some educators and their partners can and do succeed under identical, similar, and comparable circumstances. Although educators and their partners in low performing schools may claim that they cannot succeed until such time as these circumstances change, the mere fact that their colleagues do perform adequately and admirably under the same circumstances suggests otherwise. For example, colleagues in successful schools tend not to engage in social promotion practices, and they do not hold back significant numbers of their students. In contrast to teachers and principals in low performing schools, colleagues in these other schools do not have as many double binds. These observations also comprise the context for the third key.

3. Are you willing to accept shared responsibility for students' performances in your class and in your school; to ensure that you are using best practices; and to seek help, as needed, to improve your practices, your classrooms, and your school?

This rather complicated question cannot be simplified, and its importance cannot be exaggerated. It addresses the need for competent practices, i.e., doing the right things, at the right times, in the right places, for the right reasons, and with the right results. Without a commitment to competent practice, along with hard work and dedication it entails, no school improvement plan will succeed, no matter how comprehensive it may be. Without this commitment, collaborative leadership is simply another buzzword. With this commitment, collaborative leadership proceeds in relation to a clear sense of purpose and an accompanying willingness to be accountable for results, learning, and improvement.

When competent practice provides the school-wide standard, people continue to learn and improve, and, as they do, they often become experts. These experts are especially valuable because, at the same time they help children and youth, they serve as mentors to novices or "rookies." Expert mentors enable the inexperienced novices to improve their performances and to gain expertise as they learn and improve. Results also improve as competent professionals practice, learn, and develop. Everybody benefits.

In contrast, when standardized routines provide their own justification, trouble is brewing. When routines are self-serving and self-sealing, practice makes permanent, not perfect. Children do not learn and improve, and the needs of educators and their partners are not identified and addressed. In fact, when routines are self-justifying and self-sealing, educators and their partners do not perceive that they have a need to learn and improve. Nor will they welcome assistance, especially from outsiders from the community. Meanwhile, low performing schools reproduce themselves.

This third key about competent people and competent practice pertains to the two workforce quality crises identified earlier. John Goodlad, for example, claims that the better

schools will not result without better teachers, i.e., teachers who are well prepared, strongly supported, and rewarded appropriately. He is right. Better teachers for the nation's schools, especially the lowest performing ones, must be dedicated to developing competent practices. In the same vein, competent practices are needed to address the second, related workforce quality crisis. A firm commitment to competent practices is associated with better service providers and, in turn, improved agencies and quality services.

Clearly, this third key is related to the first two. Competent practice will not become a priority if professionals do not believe that all children are able to learn and succeed in school; and that they can help children succeed (the first key). Furthermore, competent practice depends on using the evidence to identify the right questions and to address the right priorities (the second key). The point is, comprehensive school improvement planning for low performing schools may be reconfigured to expand the boundaries of improvement, and to strategically focus on the quality of instruction and service provision in classrooms and in the school.

All three keys are related to the aforementioned mutual blame and maltreatment cycles in low performing schools and their surrounding communities. Outsiders looking into schools are apt to blame teachers, principals, and others in the school and in the district (e.g., superintendents), and educators looking outward blame their community partners. In essence, each stakeholder group (e.g., teachers) views the others (e.g., parents, service providers) as "the real problem." Each group operates under the assumption that "We're OK, but you're not OK. Once you clean up your act, our life and job will get easier and better."

Where low performing schools are concerned, everyone is either part of the solution or part of the problem. These three keys thus may generate dialogue and, in turn, knowledge and understanding that help people become part of the solution. The work of transforming low performing schools begins with this fundamental awareness, readiness and willingness to ask the right questions, determine the best priorities, and to seek assistance and resources as needed.

The Importance of School-Community Collaboratives

The presence of ready, willing, committed, and able people is essential, but it is not enough. Good people need to be convened, organized, and mobilized for strategic action. Cooperation is nice, and it is important, but it is not enough. Firm, sustainable partnerships are required, ones that support and promote collaborative working relationships.

Most conventional school reform plans and national school improvement networks make special provisions for this kind of organization and mobilization. For example, most plans and networks recommend the development of site teams, or design teams, and these teams take lead responsibility for planning, promoting, and implementing reforms. With a few notable exceptions, these teams do school-specific planning, and they promote walled in collaboration. This is important work, and it must continue as the boundaries of school improvement are expanded. In other words, because each school has unique characteristics, and because insiders (especially teachers) must assume collaborative leadership for their own improvement, each school must have its own site team or design team.

However, conventional school reform begins and ends with these site teams, along with their restricted focus and range of influence. As the boundaries of school improvement are expanded, and as other family and community stakeholders are needed to address all of the factors that determine children's learning, achievement, and success in school, another organizational structure is needed.

This new organizational structure is called a school-community collaborative. Collaboratives also are called consortia (voluntary associations), coalitions, and task forces. Increasingly advocates are settling on the descriptor "collaborative" because this school and community improvement work entails and promotes collaboration in addition to cooperation and coordination.

Collaboration is needed when individuals, families, professions, and organizations have interdependent needs and goals. In other words, no single person, family, profession, or organization can achieve its goals, meet its responsibilities, and honor its accountabilities without the supports provide by others. When collaborative working relationships are evident, diverse people share the same goals, along with responsibility for them. These diverse people are often called "stakeholders" because everyone has a stake in the action and in the outcomes.

Contrary to popular stereotypes about the requirements for successful teamwork, stakeholders regularly ask this question. How will this collaboration benefit me and us? Enlightened self-interest drives this question. This question suggests that stakeholders participate because it is in their best interests to do so. Collaboration is in their best interests because each fundamentally depends on the others. When one is helped and strengthened, so, in turn, are the others. When collaboratives work effectively, people and organizations benefit from high levels of reciprocity, and social trust networks develop.

Reflect anew on the needs of low performing schools. Recall the interacting and interlocking concentration effects that may intensify, multiply, and grow in areas surrounded by concentrated disadvantage. Think about the needs confronting entire feeder patterns of low performing schools. Consider the two related workforce quality crises, which require social service and education partnerships.

Once you have recalled this vivid picture, the need for collaborative working relationships becomes obvious. In other words, the aforementioned specifications for school community collaboratives correspond to some of the most important needs confronting low performing school communities. School-community collaboratives are thus an ideal way to convene, organize, and mobilize diverse stakeholders to address the needs of low performing urban schools challenged by concentrated disadvantage.

A limited brief like this one is not the place to describe school community collaboratives in detail, and this brief is not structured to give answers to questions, which educators and their partners have not asked. However, I am obliged to emphasize three important features of these collaboratives. These three features serve to heighten awareness, increase readiness, and identify incentives and rewards.

First, school community collaboratives enable schools to break out of the trap provided by linear change models with their "one at a time" sequencing. When the multiple, co-occurring needs of low performing schools are weighed against linear change models, the mismatch is apparent. By the time one or two important changes have been implemented one at a time, an entire cohort of students has moved on, while other concentration effects have not been addressed. Linear models are not the answer to the needs of low performing schools.

In contrast to these linear models, collaboratives are organized to plan and implement changes across several fronts, in several places, simultaneously. These collaboratives begin by developing a comprehensive plan or agenda. Then they "piece it out," delegating responsibilities for one or more priorities to the individuals and groups best prepared and equipped to address them. Typically, individuals and groups accept responsibilities for priorities that correspond to their specialization(s) and accountabilities.

For example, business leaders assume responsibility for their share of school-and-work and school-to-work planning. Child and family services specialists assume responsibility for child protection and family support strategies. Health care providers address child and family needs for health care, including service access and insurance reimbursements. Student support professionals assume responsibility for developing improved referral systems involving the schools and their relationship with agencies. Principals assume responsibility for finding space and developing resources in support of a family resource center or a youth development center.

Alternatively, specialized groups may combine. For example, representatives from juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health, health, and special education assume joint responsibility for children who are in all of their systems, i.e., "cross-over kids" and their families. Teachers join with youth development experts and social service providers to devise new classroom strategies that integrate conventional pedagogy, service delivery, and youth development best practices. Principals join with health care providers to plan service learning opportunities in mental health and health care settings for students interested in health-related careers. Principals, teachers, service providers, and parents join forces to improve parental participation in teacher conferences and parental involvement in their children's homework and schooling. Principals, teachers, parents, and service providers assume responsibility for supporting transitions across the feeder pattern. Parents, youth development advocates, service providers, university representatives, and counselors assume joint responsibility for mentoring students about higher education opportunities and providing assistance, supports, and resources to them and their parents. University researchers, principals, and social service agency managers collaborate in the development of new research designs tailored to the needs of low performing urban schools.

To repeat, the special value of school community collaboratives resides in their ability to complete all of these activities and many others <u>at the same time</u>. These collaboratives also prevent a common problem—namely, schools, agencies, families, and others working at cross-purposes and even competing. With collaboratives, specialized tasks are pieced out and coordinated, and they are integrated anew when the individuals and groups report back to the collaborative. Changes that might take years when one school tries to do them often get done in days, weeks, and months. In this fashion, the multiple needs of low performing schools are met

simultaneously. This improvement process is never ending because the work of helping people and their schools never ends.

The second special feature of school community collaboratives is that they provide new resources and problem-solving assistance to a school and to its feeder pattern. In Katharine Briar-Lawson's words, principals and teachers can "go shopping" at the collaborative and gain some of the assistance, social supports, resources, and problem-solving help they need.

These collaboratives are especially valuable to principals. When collaboratives are not operating, principals still have needs to go shopping, but they have to do it alone, and they spend countless hours and days doing it. Oftentimes principals' shopping may seem like a random search. All such searches take principals away from their primary responsibilities, and they add to the burdens and long hours associated with the principalship. Collaboratives thus enable principals and other educators to work smarter, not longer and harder. Others, in essence, go shopping for these principals, and they know where to shop, how, and why.

School community collaboratives have a third feature, one that doubles as a very special benefit. *Many of the factors that influence and determine learning, academic achievement, and success in school are the same ones that influence effectiveness and success in mental health, health care, child welfare, and juvenile justice. Benefits and improvements for one often result in benefits and improvements for the others.* In brief, educators' partners also will benefit when schools are effective. They remain engaged with educators and schools because of their enlightened self-interest. These partners' success and effectiveness depend fundamentally on educators' success and effectiveness.

Because everyone benefits, all are more willing to engage in school community collaboratives. Their respective efforts can be harmonized and synchronized because all are addressing the same priorities. Beyond the most obvious needs and priorities, they are able to address the interdependent causes of interacting and interlocking concentration effects, something that none of them can do without the others. For example, they can develop educational and occupational ladders for parents and their children, provide enrichment and mentoring programs in schools, stabilize family housing, and provide peer supports and mentoring systems. Schools and service systems are enhanced and improved in the process. The morale, efficacy, and well being of social and health service providers and community youth development workers improves in the process.

To reiterate, school based site teams continue to operate, and they coordinate and synchronize their work with school community collaboratives. Each school is served, and so is the entire feeder pattern. These collaborative help professionals at the same time that they benefit children, youth, families, and other community residents. For example, these relationships provide the necessary conditions for planning dialogue aimed at shared understanding and basic agreements. Above all, diverse stakeholders are able to agree on the most important priorities.

<u>Priority Setting</u>

For example, stakeholders can identify the main determinants of students' learning, achievement, and success in school; then they can address them. Risking oversimplification, these factors are:

- Exemplary teaching by competent teachers in supportive classrooms located in schools with high expectations, clear standards, and a "can do" attitude evident among teachers, principals, superintendents, other school staff, parents, and community leaders.
- A results-oriented learning and improvement system, one that emphasizes never-ending needs to "take stock," while focusing on results, progress indicators, strategies, programs, and working relationships
- A safe and secure school environment, one that nurtures the learning and healthy development of children, youth, and adults
- Peer supports and leadership programs children and youth, ones that nurture their healthy development and success in school
- Educational and economic opportunity pathways for children, youth, and parents, which are connected to schools and which link schools, students, and parents to employers and higher education institutions
- Access to high quality social and health services, especially mental health services and health care
- Parent involvement in schooling, especially parental assistance, encouragement, and supports for teachers, service providers, and children
- Opportunities for students' enriched learning and healthy development during the non-school hours and during the summer, including connections among youth development agencies, neighborhood organizations, religious institutions, families, and schools.
- Strong, stable, and secure families, especially meaningful employment for one or both parents; food security; and stable housing.

To repeat, these same factors weigh heavily in the effectiveness and successes of other helping systems. These factors also influence and determine parents' success and effectiveness. These reciprocal relationships also serve to emphasize the importance of collaboratives.

Return to the above list and take stock of how many of these factors are under the direct influence and control of educators and schools. Most school improvement plans, including ones called comprehensive reforms, include only three or four of these factors that influence and determine students' learning and academic achievement and, in turn, school success and effectiveness. Under these circumstances, educators are held accountable for learning and academic achievement outcomes, but they lack influence and control over the many of the most important influences and determinants of these outcomes. This is not a formula for success.

In fact, these unfortunate, yet understandable, circumstances are related to the workforce quality crisis. Under these circumstances, who would choose to become a teacher in a low performing urban school? Who would want to be a principal in these schools? How can educators and their partners be successful when they are unable to exert indirect influences and direct controls over the factors that determine the outcomes for which they are responsible and accountable? Clearly, in communities confronting concentrated disadvantage, educators and their partners may be destined to have, at best, limited success with their students. Using the language from the streets, "it's a set up." In today's policy climate with its emphasis on results-based accountability systems, educators and their partners are set up for blame and maltreatment because they cannot achieve all of the results they want and the children and youth under their care also need.

Getting Started

How are school community collaboratives begin their planning and implementation? This question poses problems because schools and feeder patterns are somewhat unique. Each improvement plan must be situated against the uniqueness and needs of the surrounding community. Furthermore, most schools already have a reform plan. They are implementing, say, the Accelerated Schools Model, or the School Development Program. These schools' developmental trajectories vary, and so do their priorities. A competing reform plan is the last thing educators and their partners need.

Schools with such plans can benefit from frameworks that are adaptable to all of them. Two such frameworks developed for this expressed purpose will be identified next. There are others. All such frameworks are designed to complement and strengthen every reform and improvement plan without competing with them. These frameworks focus attention on important family and community priorities and expand their boundaries of school improvement. In effect, they make school improvement more comprehensive. They also bring under educators' and their partners' spheres of influence and control the most important factors that account for school effectiveness. They are safeguards against educators being "set up."

Table 1 (attached) presents examples from a framework developed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor. They call their framework "The Enabling Component" because it is designed to enable learning and success in school. This framework is rich and extensive, and it cannot be adequately summarized here. (Refer to the resources provided in their web site at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/). The enabling areas presenting in Table 1 are merely examples. These areas enjoy a high degree of correspondence with the above list of factors that influence and determine learning, academic achievement, and success in school.

Table 2 (attached) presents examples from a second framework, one I developed with Katharine Briar-Lawson. While this second framework is somewhat different, it also reflects the influence of our friends, Adelman and Taylor. This second framework emphasizes strategies for what we call family-supportive community schools. The idea that schools might and should support families is, of course, new. Family-supportive community schools may seem like a radical idea. However, where low performing urban schools are concerned, this special emphasis on families as well as children is absolutely necessary and wholly justifiable.

Especially where poor children are involved, their parents' achievements and success, including their ability to gain and keep employment, weigh heavily in their school experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, one of the biggest problems facing children, educators, and service providers is high family transience. It results in immense student turnover in low performing schools. Turnover rates of at least 50 percent each year are problematic. Turnover rates of 75 percent or more each year are commonplace in some low performing urban schools. No staff turnover is related to, and caused by, student turnover. Until such time as this student and family transience is reduced and prevented, it will be very difficult to improve low performing schools. So, when schools do their part in stabilizing and strengthening families, they serve themselves, other service systems, and, of course, children, families, and neighborhood communities.

Successful community schools are able to reach out to families, helping to strengthen and stabilize them and preventing transience. For, when parents are invested in their children's schools and parents also derive benefits, they are very reluctant to move. In other words, schools can anchor and support parents and families, at the same time helping children. These schools serve as hubs of vibrant communities.

Readers no doubt want concrete examples in addition to generic frameworks. Other school communities have implemented quickly the following improvements:

- Create a family resource center and then prepare and employ parents as teacher aides and social and health service aides
- Develop parent education and support programs, especially ones that link and harmonize the efforts of educators and schools with parents and families.
- Prepare and support youth advocates who work in after school programs and in youth development agencies; and who mediate relationships among educators, service providers, and parents, encouraging school success and preventing drop outs
- Develop community-based alternative schools for children and youth who are suspended and expelled from school; and who need alternative schedules, learning experiences, and school-related structures
- Develop a coordinated plan for the deployment of social and health service providers, ensuring that there are enough for each school and for the entire feeder pattern (see Adelman and Taylor's work in this area)
- Place social and health service providers in classrooms with teachers, helping teachers to develop more effective teaching-learning strategies and giving them the time to personalize instruction
- Develop formal partnerships with higher education institutions in support of service learning by undergraduate students, field placements for professional students, and educational pathways for academic enrichment

- Enrich teacher education and principal preparation programs by including proficiency in a second language and emphasizing new strategies for cultural competence

- Develop special summer programs that employ and pay students, and link these summer experiences to success in school and to higher education pathways

- Develop youth-led school planning and improvement teams and facilitate their work in developing caring school communities

- Develop a list of norms and behaviors that will improve the quality of treatment and interaction in the school, at home, and in community agencies; and make everyone responsible for norm enforcement

- Convene principals, representative teachers, social and health service providers, and early childhood educators and commence planning for entire feeder patterns

- Develop with higher education partners seamless feeder patterns and pathways that begin in preschool and end with a baccalaureate degree (P-16 initiatives).

Unlike past practice, educators do not have to do this work alone. They do not have to implement these changes one at a time. *When a school community collaborative is in place, all of the above changes and others can be implemented at the same time.*

Moreover, the choices available to a school, a feeder pattern, and to school districts expand. Although the idea of developing community schools, or full service community schools, or beacon schools, may emerge as the most viable alternative, it is not the only one.

In other words, the success formula for turning around low performing urban schools does not depend automatically on a particular kind of school. This success formula prioritizes school and community improvement. *This success formula depends on gaining influence and control over all of the factors that determine children's learning, healthy development, academic achievement, and success in school.* Rather than asking one school and its feeder patterns to accept sole responsibility for all of this work—as often has been claimed in relation to full service community schools—school community collaboratives enable strategic decisions about who does what, where, when, how, and why. Ultimately, most or all of the priorities are addressed, and these priorities are connected and integrated.

Because community resources have been allowed to erode in so many urban areas, it has been necessary to develop community schools, full service community schools, and beacon schools. In other words, these multi-purpose and multi-service schools have been good solutions for these communities.

On the other hand, communities and schools differ, and so will their solutions. Community schools, in their various forms, need to be tailored in fit local needs and circumstances. In the 21st Century, one size fits few.

School community collaboratives provide the organizing, mobilizing, and decision-making structures for developing tailored solutions. When these collaboratives operate effectively, they produce stronger, hybrid models, which fit local needs and contexts. These collaboratives involve parents in ways that schools alone cannot. For these reasons alone, comprehensive school community collaboratives are indispensable to the work of turning around low performing urban schools.

A Self Assessment Inventory

There is another way to identify priorities for a school, its feeder patterns, and for school community collaboratives. A self-assessment inventory raises key questions, ones that signal priorities and targets for action. At the same time, these questions increase awareness and enhance readiness in support of collaborative leadership.

Table 3 (attached) presents such a self-assessment inventory, which I developed for this brief. The 35 questions comprising it derive from the three keys presented earlier. They also derive from the examples presented in Tables 1 and 2.

These questions are not mutually exclusive. Each is connected with the others, and some are interdependent. Although they are numbered to facilitate dialogue, they are not rank-ordered. Furthermore, the whole they constitute is greater than the sum of the parts.

Each question can be reworded quickly into a statement of belief or conviction. These statements may then be made public. Once they are made public, and approved in some form, they are ready to be incorporated in school improvement plans. For example, some of them are candidates for mission statements. Others might be included in proclamations of a school's core values and commitments, which are posted on the school's walls.

One final qualification: This inventory has been developed primarily for educators, especially teachers, principals, superintendents, state agency leaders, and education professors. It is designed to recruit, convince, and engage them, not merely as professionals with a job they must do, but also, as people who have needs and aspirations. This holistic aim compels a personal narrative, one that speaks effectively to each person. (Refer now to Table 3.)

The Inventory's Implications

Don't underestimate the changes implicated by these 35 questions. Individually and collectively, they involve profound changes at many levels—individual, professional, school, district, and state agency. The list itself is daunting to some educators and their partners.

For example, consider question 32 (regarding classroom helpers for teachers). Many teachers chose their teaching career because they wanted to have their own classrooms, and they envisioned working alone with their own children. Although they may benefit from having helpers in their classrooms and from collaborative working relationships with parents, service providers, and youth development experts, this new initiative changes the work of teaching and the career identities of teachers. This is a profound change; and if it is accepted, teachers will

need resources, assistance, and supports. Some school and district policies may need to change in support of these new practices.

Question 29 provides another important example. School-based student support providers must harmonize and synchronize their work with community-based health and social service providers. This work involves new practices in schools and in community agencies. It requires new policies in support of integrated services. Furthermore, colleges and universities must adapt their professional education programs to prepare workers for interprofessional collaboration and family-centered collaboration. In other words, this work involves both systems change and cross-systems change. Here, too, profound policy and practice changes are required.

Feeling Overwhelmed and "Turned Off": Another Double Bind

The bad news is that the prospect of so many changes may be overwhelming. In fact, several reviewers of this brief and this inventory have offered the following observation. "You must be kidding; these change strategies and targets are not anywhere on educators' radar screens." One implication is that many educators and their partners may answer "no" or "I don't know" to most, or to all, of these questions. Another implication is that educators will be threatened and turned off. If so, they will retreat, adopt a defensive posture, and become more entrenched.

Once again, empathy is required, along with a strategy that builds from it. Where these educators are concerned, these questions and the inventory place them squarely on the horns of a dilemma. Like all dilemmas, this one presents educators with two choices, and they may not like either one.

The choice of learning about, implementing, and evaluating so many new initiatives, which dramatically change their work and their schools and require an inordinate amount of effort, is overwhelming. This choice may turn off some educators, and it will scare off others. Here, educators retreat from alternatives that promise to help them.

The second choice involves not doing anything more or less, or of selectively implementing and evaluating one or two initiatives. This choice keeps educators and their schools locked in to linear change models and one-at-a-time sequencing. Results will not improve significantly because the range of strategies, programs, and interventions is insufficiently comprehensive. The workforce quality problem will not change. Low performing urban schools will remain more or less the same, affecting two or more generations of children and youth.

Assume, for the moment, that you are a principal and that the majority of your staff says no to changes that will benefit them and their students. What do you do then? In business and industry, dissenting staff would be released and committed people would be recruited to replace them. The improvement process is not so easy, or so ruthless, in schools. For example, unions are vigilant over all personnel processes.

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One solution lies in what schools are and do. They are educative institutions. One solution, therefore, is to provide learning and professional development experiences. Ask educators to confront the 35 questions alone, and their response is predictable. Provide for them the learning and development supports, and the responses will change. Educators working in schools that have made these changes and improved because they did are especially important in these professional education and development experiences. Experienced leaders make foreign and unimaginable strategies and programs seem feasible and desirable. They quickly expand educators' radar screens, enabling them to identify the meaning and significance of important policy and practice "blips."

A second solution is to develop new policies that provide incentives and rewards. These policies should encourage educators and their partners to say "yes" to these 35 questions and enabling the accompanying work. Low performing urban schools often suffer from resource shortfalls, including money shortages. Grants in support of targeted improvement initiatives serve as important incentives.

The third solution, mentioned at the outset of this brief, is already operating. As voucher plans and charter schools gain popularity, they may force school boards, superintendents, principals, and other educators to consider priorities and strategies not currently "on their radar screens." Organizational survival and resources are at stake here, and they serve as powerful incentives to change.

The good news is that school community collaboratives and the related know how provide for educators, collectively and individually, are way out of this dilemma and the double binds it imposes. Educators do not have to do this work alone. Their work does not need to be impaired by "one at a time" thinking and improvement strategies. The know how for transforming low performing urban schools into high performing schools is developing rapidly if only educators and their partners will welcome it and use it. As more adults and additional resources are added to the schools, educators receive the help and supports they need. And, because these adults will need direction, professional educators are positioned to provide collaborative leadership.

Viewing Crises as Opportunities for Strategic Investments

This brief began with a call to action, one justified by looming crises. Americans, like people in other nations, may confront shortages in some aspects of their lives, but alleged crises are not on their lists of shortages. Seemingly every day Americans are bombarded with crisis-oriented messages. Understandably, some people are weary of crisis-oriented calls to action, and they are wary of alarmist people who write briefs like this one.

Low performing urban schools are associated with the healthy development and well being of millions of children and youth. The vitality of these schools' neighborhoods, the strengths of their family systems, the effectiveness of health and social service systems, and the development of entire cities all depend fundamentally on these schools. When these schools do not function effectively, a crisis is indeed brewing, and concerned people must take notice. However, these low performing urban schools also present important opportunities, along with

multiple benefits, which are not confined to these schools. These opportunities and benefits are emphasized in this, the final section of my brief.

If educators and their partners are able to accept these any or all of the aforementioned claims at face value, then they have reached the first phase in addressing the needs and problems confronting low performing urban schools. Their awareness has enabled their readiness for collaborative leadership. This leadership emphasis is genuine. Its importance is self-evident when school-related inertia is considered and when the history of school reform is consulted. Educators simply must assume leadership for a comprehensive school improvement agenda if it is to serve them, their students, parents, service providers, and the public at large. Working with their partners, they can turn low performing schools into high performing schools.

The alternative is less encouraging. Educators can continue to work at cross purposes with parents, community leaders, service providers, and other external constituencies, as is so often the case. Indeed, this scenario is evident in many of today's low performing schools. It involves self-defeating and self-sealing behavioral and attitudinal patterns involving all of the important stakeholders. It is time to stop the bickering and blaming, while encouraging diverse people to accept their mutual responsibilities and joint accountabilities. As the popular saying goes, "everyone is either part of the problem or part of the solution."

The Limits of School-Community Collaboratives

School community collaboratives may be potent, but they are not omnipotent. Low performing school communities evidence profound resource and technical assistance needs, necessitating new policies and other investment strategies.

As the language of self-sufficiency and personal accountability continues to gain popularity, and as the twin ideas of less government and more local control are promoted, it may be tempting to assume that low performing schools do not require more money. It also may be tempting to assume that the answer to schools' needs is merely more people power in support of so-called social capital development. These two assumptions are as dangerous as they are spurious. After decades of neglect, low performing urban schools merit new investments. So do their surrounding communities. These schools and communities need more money and, until they have it, dedicated, hard working people will spend an inordinate amount of time writing grants. These are the same people who could, and should, be devoting their attention to children, families, schools, community agencies, and neighborhood organizations.

No doubt existing funds can be used more prudently and strategically. Additionally, existing funds can be accessed in new ways. For example, low performing schools appear to be less likely to know about how to access existing federal funding opportunities (e.g., Title IV-E and Title XIX of the Social Security Act). Furthermore, funding in support of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) might be redirected to improve schools at the same time that children and families are supported.

The fact remains, however, that these low performing schools often serve as mirror images of the savage inequalities that surround them. They need money, technical assistance and social supports.

These needs and others are highlighted in a brand new report, The First Annual School Improvement Report: Executive Order on Actions to Turn Around Low-Performing Schools (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/LPS/srptfinal.pdf). This report provides evidence in support of federal, state, and local neglect, together with the failure to act strategically. For example, California is home to some 3,000 under-performing schools, and yet, the state has prioritized the needs of only 340 of them. California is not alone. New York City has some 230 low performing schools.

This report identifies some of the needs of low performing schools, including some of needs related to more resources and supports, which are outlined in this brief. Two of this new report's most important findings are as follows. Almost one-fourth of the principals participating in this study reported that they did not take any additional steps to improve their schools; and nearly one-third of them reported that they did not know what their districts considered to be adequate yearly progress.

The more things change, the more they remain the same. If you don't know where you are headed, then any road will take you there.

Balancing Responsibilities and Accountabilities

Many low performing schools are like ships awash in what their stakeholders perceive as stormy urban seas. Their potential leaders often lack the compasses needed for effective navigation. For that matter, these people may not have effective school improvement maps of the most dangerous reefs, rip tides, and rocky shoals. Even if they do have maps, these maps are problem-oriented and negative; they often emphasize what to avoid, not where to go. These maps are deficient in another way. They often do not include safe harbors, navigational assets, and routings to success.

When educators and their partners are awash in stormy urban seas without good maps and compasses, they tend to be reactive, inward looking, and control oriented. Being awash, along with not being able to imagine life on the school ship in any other way, serves to keep them awash. *They tend to be preoccupied with what is happening to them at the expense of what they can do to make things happen.* Educators and their partners simply must assume joint responsibility and accountability for developing better maps and navigational systems and for charting new courses for successful improvement journeys. To reiterate, educators include professors, and their partners include social and health service providers, including professors of social work, public health, nursing, etc.

On the other hand, merely blaming educators and for their low performing schools precludes more comprehensive discussions about joint responsibility and shared accountability. In fact, framing and naming these urban challenges as "the problem of low performing schools" serves to make educators and their partners victims who are blamed for their plight. This label

also absolves other people and agencies of their responsibilities and accountabilities, and it encourages limited, school-specific policies and resource pools.

Once the problem is framed and named differently, other attributions and solutions become apparent. For example, frame and name the problem as one of "urban neighborhood communities facing concentrated disadvantage and concentration effects" and the range of solutions increases. Community economic and social development strategies become an imperative, and so do related strategies to address the problems and needs caused by social exclusion, social isolation, and pervasive social and economic inequalities. As these other strategies gain importance, ideas expand about who is responsible and accountable for the problems of low performing urban schools. In short, educators cannot do it all, alone, and policies must be grounded in due recognition of this fact.

Powerful structural forces such as economic globalization and the deindustrialization of cities, which is associated with the new global economy, are in part responsible for concentrated disadvantage. The dismantling of the social safety net for the most vulnerable individuals and families also is responsible for concentrated disadvantage. For example, it is one thing to require work and to announce its benefits; it is quite another to create meaningful jobs in areas where they have disappeared and to provide child care assistance and family supports.

In brief, structurally induced adversity requires structural remedies. Governments, no less than educators and their partners, must assume their responsibilities for these structural causes, and they must assume their fair share accountability for the needs and progress of low performing urban schools.

Investing in Low Performing Urban Schools

A new American president has made education his top priority. He claims that "no child will be left behind." His agenda merits support. Why not begin serious implementation, with federal and state resources in support thereof, in low performing urban schools?

At the same time, state and national initiatives are being mounted in support of a new generation of school leaders. Led by the DeWitt-Wallace Readers' Digest Fund, several organizations are addressing the workforce quality crisis. Why not focus leadership development initiatives on low performing urban schools and their special needs? Why not make these leadership initiatives truly collaborative by joining the preparation of educators with the preparation of their most important partners (e.g., social and health service providers, community developers)? Why not prioritize the preparation interprofessional school and community leaders, persons who are able to cross professional and organizational boundaries and promote effective working arrangements? Why not prepare a new generation of university and college faculty who know how to do this collaborative work?

When the social and economic costs of failure are weighed against the benefits of success, it is evident that low performing schools must become the top policy and practice priority for concerned citizens and their local, state, and national governments. Low performing urban schools are strategic investment sites. These schools exact steep economic costs,

especially when workforce development issues are considered. The attendant social costs are inestimable. In other words, politics are involved, not just economics, because strong democracy is at stake. These low performing urban schools implicate profound constitutional and legal issues related to distributive justice and to the entitlements of citizens. How much savage inequality can the nation tolerate?

I will close this brief with a vignette and its implication. A few years ago, I participated in a school leadership development program during which I presented some of the ideas contained in this brief. When my presentation ended, a local superintendent approached me. A warm, friendly person, he placed his hand on my shoulder and confronted me directly. Here are his words: "Hal, I really like what you've presented, and your enthusiasm is great. But your stuff doesn't apply to my situation. We don't have *those kinds of schools* because we don't have *those kinds of neighborhoods*." I listened as politely as I could. And then I asked him the following question. "What is your drop out rate?" He replied: "*Only* 15 percent."

Only 15 percent. What about the new president's goal to leave no child behind? This superintendent had normalized the drop out rate. In comparison to low performing urban schools, his school system's drop out rate was a success indicator. Something is fundamentally wrong when a drop out rate serves as a success indicator.

Organizational theorists call instances like these "competency traps." Managers stop looking for alternatives because they are convinced, in essence, that today's outcomes and situations are "as good as it gets."

When no one truly believes that low performing schools can be turned around, and when competency traps prevail, it is tempting to practice a kind of educational triage. Just as medical units triage patients who can be saved, educators, their partners and policy makers may focus on the students who can be saved. Policy makers' triage involves giving students vouchers. Educators' triage involves normalizing their failures while celebrating their success stories. Some educators and partners may justify their failures with familiar reasoning—namely, "they had their chance, and they blew it." Indeed, some students simply refuse to attend school and take advantage of its benefits.

In presenting this vignette and the ideas of competency traps and educational triage, I do not intend to underestimate the challenges of universal public schooling, or to criticize this superintendent. My point is to provide three reminders.

First, many schools are not 100 percent effective with all of their students. Second, even though these organizations are not called low performing schools, they evidence some of the same self-sealing patterns. Third, although these successful and adequate schools are not located in urban areas challenged by concentrated disadvantage, these schools nevertheless must serve children and youth manifesting so-called urban challenges. Profound demographic changes already are underway, and there is no end in sight. For example, many suburban schools already are evidencing growing student diversity, including increasing numbers of students challenged by poverty, social exclusion, social isolation, and inequality. For many students and their families, English is a second language.

A growing number of rural schools, especially ones in the western states, manifest some of the same challenges. Although rural settings are different from their urban and suburban counterparts, cross-setting lesson drawing and information exchanges will provide multiple benefits. The know-how exists to meet these challenges.

The implication is that, as low performing schools are turned around, educators and their partners can develop new knowledge, understanding, and new strategies. This new knowledge, understanding, and strategic base will benefit all of the nation's schools. *All schools are able to learn from, and benefit from, the success stories of low performing urban schools.*

To reiterate, my friendly superintendent does not deserve to be blamed, and he is not alone in needing some help with his drop out rate, along with its meaning and significance. This superintendent has a drop out rate for some of the same reasons that low performing schools have their drop out rates. Schools' effectiveness and success will be limited, to greater or lesser degrees, so long as they remain stand-alone, container organizations. The expertise of professional educators is indispensable, but educators cannot do it all, alone.

Low performing urban schools with their family, community, and higher education partnerships promise to increase knowledge and understanding about school effectiveness. The attendant benefits are not limited to these low performing schools. All public schools stand to benefit, in some form, from the success stories of low performing schools. Many school communities can benefit from school-community collaboratives, and nearly every community needs to these collaboratives' promotion of democratic schooling and democratic engagement.

For all of these reasons, low performing school communities merit strategic investments. These new investments will accelerate these school communities' second, more positive social transformation. Low performing schools facing concentrated disadvantage can be transformed back to their original state as high performing schools promoting concentrated advantage. As they are transformed, their neighborhoods will be improved. Then it will become evident that investments in schools and in their higher education partners double as investments in cities, states, and regions. These investments build the human potential, i.e., what some economists call "human capital." These investments fortify the claim that no child will be left behind. Democracy is strengthened, the economy is bolstered, and social problems that drain precious economic and social resources are prevented.

Thus, these investments in low performing urban schools, their surrounding communities, and in their higher education partners are a good thing to do, and they are the "right" thing to do. Instead of bemoaning all that is wrong and all that is not happening, it is time to seize the attendant opportunities and to make good things happen. It is timely to promote collaborative leadership in support of competent practices and new policies. By meeting the needs of low performing urban schools, citizens from all walks of life will be safeguarding democracy, while enhancing sustainable urban development.

Table 1. Enabling Students' Learning by Focusing on Six Interrelated Areas

1. Classroom-Focused Enabling: Increase teachers' effectiveness by preventing and handling problems in the classroom and fostering children's socio-emotional and physical development.

Work in this area requires: (1) programs for personalized professional development (for teachers and aides), (2) systems to expand resources, (3) programs for temporary out of class help, and (4) programs to develop aides, volunteers, and any others who help in classrooms or who work with teachers to enable learning. Through classroom-based enabling programs, teachers are better prepared to address similar problems when they arise in the future.

2. Student and Family Assistance Through Direct Services and Referral: Provide special services in a personalized way to assist with a broad range of needs.

Work in this area requires: (1) Programs designed to support classroom focused enabling--with special emphasis on reducing the need for teachers to seek special programs and services, (2) a stakeholder information program on how to access information and help, (3) systems to facilitate requests for assistance and strategies to evaluate them, (4) a programmatic approach for handling referrals, (5) programs providing direct service, (6) programmatic approaches for effective case and resource management, (7) interface with community outreach to assimilate additional resources into current service delivery, and (8) relevant education for stakeholders.

3. Crisis Assistance and Prevention: Minimize impacts of and prevent crises.

Work in this area requires (1) systems and programs for emergency/crisis response; (2) prevention programs for the school community to address safety, violence reduction, suicide prevention and child abuse, and (3) relevant education for stakeholders.

4. Support for Transitions: Minimize and relieve stresses associated with major life changes of children and families.

Work in this area requires (1) programs to establish a welcoming and socially supportive community, (2) programs for students' articulation within and across grade and school levels and between home and school, (3) before and after school programs to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment, and (4) relevant education for stakeholders.

5. Home Involvement in Schooling: Respond to parents' learning and support needs so they can support their children's learning and healthy development.

Work in this area requires: (1) programs to address adult learning and support needs in the home, (2) programs to help those in the home meet their basic obligations to the student, (3) systems to improve communication about matters essential to the student and family, (4) programs to enhance the home-school connection and sense of community, (5) interventions to enhance participation in making decisions that are essential to the student, (6) programs to enhance home support related to the student's basic learning and development, (7) interventions to mobilize those at home to problem solve in response to student needs, (8) intervention to solicit help (support, collaboration, partnerships) from those at home with respect to meeting classroom, school, and community needs, and (9) relevant education for stakeholders.

6. Community Outreach for Involvement and Support (Including Volunteers): Build linkages and collaborations, develop greater involvement in schooling, and enhance support for efforts to enable learning.

Work in this area requires (1) programs to recruit community involvement and support, (2) systems and programs for training, screening and maintaining volunteers, (3) outreach programs to hard-to-involve students and families, (4) programs to enhance community-school connections and sense of community; and (5) relevant education for stakeholders.

Table 2. Thirteen Improvement Strategies for Family-supportive Community Schools

1. School readiness, parent education and family support:

Prenatal programs, birth to three initiatives, and early childhood education must become a universal entitlement to enhance school readiness. (Studies show that birth weight alone is an important predictor of child learning, health and development.) These school readiness programs also are keys to health care reform and social service reform. They require so-called two-generation strategies: Helping and supporting the parent at the same time that the child(ren) are helped and educated.

2. Caring classrooms that improve children's learning while enhancing teachers' and parents' efficacy:

The heart of school improvement is the classroom, and classroom-based improvements must respond to teachers' needs as well as children's and parents'. Some classroom-based improvements are cultural. They necessitate fostering cultural norms of caring, respect for individual differences, high expectations in standards and success for all. They also necessitate enhancing teacher understanding of racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, especially viewing diversity as an asset. Structural improvements target the loneliness and isolation of teachers. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with other educators, service providers and with parents to facilitate attitudinal and behavioral changes about vulnerable children and their families. To implement these attitudinal and behavioral changes effectively, teachers require much greater support. One way is to provide helpers other than certified teachers - especially parents who see their work as jobs and are paid. Another is to involve parents in collaborative problem solving, accepting shared responsibility for problems such as truancy, suspension, and drug abuse, or starting networks such as homework clubs, based on social trust, where no child is allowed to fall through the cracks.

3. Improved classroom supports and resources for teachers and children:

Teachers need to be the lead designers of changes that occur in their classrooms. They need additional supports and resources so that they can attend to every child's needs and meet rigorous accountability standards. The idea is to support teachers and stop the "push-outs" and "pull-outs" of children with special, often short-tem, needs. It entails placing more helpers in the classroom and developing a parent team and parent-professional teams, which are "on call" to attend to problems in the classroom. When problems arise, this support can be personalized for the particular needs of the child, the family, and the situation. Teachers are supported and gain a precious commodity—time to learn, teach, and improve.

4. Collaborative school leadership:

Principals and superintendents also need supports and new resources, and they gain both in this model. Principals develop collaborative leadership styles—they encourage commitment to practices that improve results, rather than merely seeking compliance to rules. They no longer do it all alone, working endless hours at the expense of their personal lives and well being. The "principalship" includes school-family-community coordinators who work with service providers and supervise after-school programs. Like teachers who gain new supports and resources, principals' jobs are recast. They are able to spend more quality time with their staff, parents, and community leaders. They become key child and family advocates who work with parents to connect the school with family and community resources; and to develop support for students' transitions from one level to the next. Similarly, superintendents collaborate with their counterparts in child welfare, mental health, health, and juvenile justice to secure the supports and resources they need. Superintendents also educate their school boards and district officials, facilitating policy change in support of new models of educational renewal.

5. Educational communities:

The actual time children spend in classrooms is limited. As the growing number of after-school programs suggests, opportunities for learning, healthy development and well being must be provided for children and youth during the non school hours. In the absence of this strategy, miseducative, harmful communities (e.g., gangs) emerge. Educational communities—learning and health-enhancing programs offered by youth development agencies, neighborhood organizations, churches, and schools—can enhance school performance, while supporting

families and communities. Youth advocates and youth development specialists will develop firm connections with teachers, principals, and service providers. All need to be "on the same page."

6. School and community collaboratives:

Form a school-community-family collaborative (consortium) comprising educators, parents, policy leaders, business representatives, social and health agencies, and media representatives--to facilitate and monitor both school, neighborhood and community development initiatives. Instead of having to improve in a linear fashion—implementing just one program or change at a time over many years—this community collaborative enables multiple improvement initiatives, mounted simultaneously on several fronts. These multiple initiatives are "pieced out:" Each is assigned to the lead profession and organization best suited to implement and evaluate it. Key resources and supports for schools and families are generated in the process; and, results improve.

7. Support for transitions:

Children and youth will be supported as they move from one school to others and from one grade level to the next; and, families will be supported as they move into new schools and school districts.

8. Technology enhancement and use:

Educational renewal in high poverty communities requires investments in technology. Use cable television and computer networking as a powerful tool for teaching and learning, and for strengthening communities by linking families, schools, homes, neighborhoods, higher education institutions, businesses and community agencies. Technology enhancement improves schooling, promotes occupational development, and fosters strong connections among diverse stakeholders in the school and the community. Networked this way, there are countless opportunities for improving schools and strengthening families. For example, technology networks enhance communication among all key stakeholders in the lives of children and families, and they promote barter systems, skill and resource exchanges, and other mutual aid and assistance networks.

9. Parent empowerment and family support:

The optimal learning environment for a child involves a close collaboration between educators and the family. Blaming parents for the condition and characteristics of their children does little to foster learning and improvement. Instead, involve parents and empower them to systematically define their own challenges—especially the challenges that might be in the way of an optimal education for their children—and to search out unique solutions that will work for them. Schools then become a resource place for parents as well as their children; schools become family-supportive. Schools provide services and support that parents have identified as needed in their community. Many such supports are educational—for example, literacy classes sponsored by the parents and run by teachers. School-based family resource centers run by parents are a fundamental requirement. Family supportive schools reveal the vast and almost limitless energy and advocacy that is possible when the full range of parent talent is nurtured and supported. These schools promote educational renewal, in addition to specific school improvements, because the parents link the school with key community resources and supports.

10. Paraprofessional jobs and career ladders for parents:

Unemployment, poverty and high mobility are three key predictors of family-related problems. Every educator knows that these same predictors also limit school improvement plans. The need exists to find effective ways to support, stabilize, and strengthen families—especially to reduce and prevent students' transience. Developing pathways for success—educational and employment ladders—is as important for parents as it is for children. In other words, when educators and their partners support parents' education and employment, they also benefit students and themselves. Parents can attend reading groups facilitated by teachers, volunteer in classrooms, and receive formal training as paraprofessionals. Gaining efficacy and commitment, parents are able to help themselves and their children, while supporting other parents and families. Some will decide to become teachers and service providers themselves, building on this training. Children's educational and occupational aspirations develop as their parents' hopes are realized.

11. **Resource development:**

Existing resources will be mobilized and re-deployed, and new resources will be developed. Advocacy for equity will become a top priority.

12. **Simultaneous renewal of higher education:**

Reform at the school level requires similar, interactive reforms in the higher education setting. Strategic partnerships provide opportunities to improve the education of educators, along with the preparation of social and health service providers. University students and interns add to the resource pool for school communities. Interprofessional preparation programs, which prepare educators and service providers to collaborate, are enhanced because of the direct practice experiences partner school communities provide.

13. **Policy change:**

Policies affecting accountability, funding, program development and evaluation, supervision, and resource deployment will change in response to the innovations and achievements in schools and in their surrounding communities. For example, some schools will be encouraged and permitted to innovate in response to local strengths, aspirations, and needs. Social and health service agencies will release some of their staff from conventional duties, enabling them to work closely with classroom teachers and others at the school.

Table 3. A Self Assessment Inventory for Educators and Their Partners

1. Are you prepared for a more comprehensive approach to school improvement, one that requires integrative thinking?

2. Are you convinced that even the most challenged, low performing school can become a high performing, successful school?

3. Do you believe that all children and youth can learn, achieve, and succeed in school, especially culturally diverse students challenged by poverty, social isolation, social exclusion, economic and social inequality, and concentrated disadvantage?

4. Are you able to avoid deficit-oriented thinking and language and look for assets, strengths, and aspirations on which to build improvement plans for students and for your school?

5. Do you believe that racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is an educational resource waiting to be developed, and not a deficit needing to be repaired?

6. Are you able to recognize and strengthen aspirations, developmental assets, protective factors, and resilience, especially in the most vulnerable children, youth, and families?

7. Are you willing to accept that vulnerable children, youth, parents, and families possess expertise about their needs and problems, including which knowledge about how best to address them?

8. Are you willing to engage these children, youth, parents, and families in joint problem solving (knowing that, unless you do, they may be indifferent to your efforts and, even worse, they may resist and sabotage them)?

9. As your promote own professional status, power, and authority as teachers and school administrators, are you also advocating a more democratic, collaborative kind of professionalism, one that differs from the medical model?

10. Are you ready to accept that cultural assimilation models (and melting pot theory) cause student, family, and school problems, and are you prepared to explore cultural accommodation models ("rainbow theory") and culturally-responsive teaching-learning strategies?

11. Are you willing to accept the limits of viewing the school as a stand-alone organization concerned solely with children's academic achievement, an organization in which educators "do it all, alone."

12. You may feel blamed, maltreated, unsupported, and unappreciated, and so do some children and youth, parents, community members, and social and health service providers. Are you prepared to help address mutual blame and maltreatment cycles, helping to develop shared understanding and working agreements?

13. Are you convinced that school improvement initiatives will not be wholly effective and successful so long as peer group, family, and community impediments to children's learning, healthy development, and well being are not addressed?

14. Do you believe that, in order for schools to be successful, families must be must be supported, strengthened, and stabilized; and neighborhood communities must be safe, secure, and vibrant? In other words, do you view school improvement, youth development, family support, and community social and economic development as interdependent initiatives?

15. Are you prepared to collaborate with parents, community leaders, and social and health service providers, viewing them as indispensable partners in the education of children and in school improvement?

16. Are you prepared to proceed beyond "fix, then teach" thinking, developing with parents, service providers, and community leaders new teaching-learning strategies, which integrate youth development and service delivery?

17. Are you prepared to help identify and support "cross-over kids" who are in special education, juvenile justice, child welfare, substance abuse, and mental health; and who often "fall through the cracks" perpetuated by these systems?

18. Are you prepared to enrich your school's emphasis on subjects by becoming child- and youth-centered schools and family-supportive, community schools?

19. Are you prepared to abandon linear, "one at a time" approaches to school improvement?

20. Are you prepared to support, and participate in, the development of school-community collaboratives, i.e., groups that effectively coordinate the work of diverse professionals, community leaders and families and in which improvements are launched simultaneously on several fronts?

21. Although you will need outside resources, and you must be prepared to welcome assistance, are you prepared to say "no" to outsiders who claim that they are the saviors for community residents, their schools, and other organizations?

22. Are you able to do your part in developing educational, employment and economic opportunity pathways for students and their parents?

23. Are you prepared and able to work with family, community, and higher education partners to provide children, youth, and families with the assistance, resources, and supports they need to proceed along these pathways?

24. Are you convinced that improvement efforts in your school are not enough; and that other schools in your feeder pattern also must improve as you do?

25. Are you prepared to do your part in easing two kinds of student, parent and family transitions: Ones associated with student promotions to the next level and ones accompanying families' residential changes?

26. Are you able to view your work and the school's operations through the eyes of the most vulnerable parents; and, in response, to develop parent empowerment and family support programs, which complement conventional parent involvement and PTA programs?

27. Are you prepared to support and actively promote the development of parent and family resource centers at your school?

28. Are you prepared to support and actively promote parent training and family support programs (i.e., ones that prepare parents to work as teacher aides, youth mentors, and social and health service provider aides)?

29. Are you prepared to support of comprehensive planning across your school's feeder pattern, which improves the service quality and effectiveness and involves changing job descriptions and responsibilities?

30. Are you prepared to welcome and support partners working in after-school programs and in youth development agencies, collaborating with them to strengthen connections to your classrooms?

31. Are you prepared to celebrate your partners' successes with your students, knowing that you depend on each other?

32. Are you prepared to invite helpers such as paraprofessionals, elders, and service providers into your classrooms in order to gain more time, save energy, give individual students more attention, and prevent behavioral problems?

33. Do you view all of the aforementioned change targets as enabling you to work smarter, while enhancing your working conditions, job satisfaction, efficacy, and overall well being?

34. Are you prepared to view improvements in your job, efficacy, and well being?

35. Are you prepared to learn your ways through the challenging mazes of complex change, using evaluation to monitor your progress and use this information to learn and improve, and innovate?

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